World Champion

OF

V. VIKTOROV

V. VIKTOROV

WIZARD OF ICE HOCKEY

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
Moscow 1957

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN
BY D. SKVIRSKY

DESIGNED
BY A. YERASOV

~796
A 1822

I

The time: twenty-five years ago. The place: the little town of Sestroretsk near Leningrad. A snub-nosed lad was driving a wicker ball across the ice in the skating-rink of an old factory that was built in the days of Peter the Great. The boy played on his school team and his elder brother and father, an engineer at the Sestroretsk factory, never missed a match. The latter were fine Russian hockey players themselves.

The boy's father, Mikhail Bobrov, was on the factory's first team. He was a player of long standing and passed his love for Russian hockey on to his sons, teaching them the fine points of the game. The merits of one famous player or another and the subtleties of defence or attack were favourite subjects of discussion at the Bobrovs. No wonder that small, snub-nosed Vsevolod was a confirmed hockey enthusiast at the age of ten, made the Leningrad picked boys' team at sixteen, became a celebrity at the Sestroretsk factory, and, at eighteen, was selected to play for the Dynamo, the strongest team in Leningrad.

Few people know the details of Vsevolod Bobrov's life. It is generally believed that he made his debut in sports in 1944, when he appeared as a member of the Central Army Club football eleven. Many people regarded his successes in ice hockey with wonder, forgetting that he started out as a hockey player and until the age of eighteen only dreamed of football.

When World War II broke out, Bobrov was evacuated to Omsk together with the factory, at which, with his father, he worked in the tool shop. In Omsk, he enrolled in a military school.

Bobrov took up football when he was already in the Army. He displayed a remarkable aptitude for the game and with surprising rapidity won a place among such top-flight forwards as Fedotov, Nikolayev, Grinin and Dyomin. A year later the forward Vsevolod Bobrov joined one of the Soviet Union's leading teams, which visited Britain, the home of association football, and gave an excellent account of itself in that country. After that Bobrov played in many international games and his name soon became widely known to football fans.

Bobrov the ice hockey player owes the shaping of his character to football. During the years that he was in the Army team's famous line of attack he learned to muster his strength and will-power when he needed them most and gained confidence in himself as the organizer of his team's assaults.

All football fans in the Soviet Union doubtlessly remember the great championship match between the Central Army Club and the Moscow Dynamo in 1948. Before the decisive game with the Army, the Dynamo was at the top of the league with a lead of one point. A draw was all they needed to clinch the championship. For the Army, a draw was tantamount to defeat.

To become champions they had to win at all cost! But the score was tied at 2 : 2. The Army stormed the goal of their opponents, but the score remained unchanged. The gong sounded. There were only five minutes of play left. Defeat stared the team in the face. And then Bobrov, fast, collected, and refusing to accept that verdict, broke through to the ball as it bounced off the cross-bar and sent it into the goal with a powerful kick. The referee's whistle announced that the critical goal had been scored and that the game was over.

Though he is sixty-five years old, Mikhail Bobrov (right) hates to part with his skates and hockey stick. He frequently goes to watch his son train and to get a taste of the "good old days" with him. Our picture shows Vsevolod Bobrov (left) and his friend Yevgeni Babich giving the old veteran a "work-out"

While Bobrov's ardour for hockey helped him to develop his tactical skill—the marvellous ability to keep the rink in his field of vision while skating at whirlwind speed—and quickly to win a berth on the country's best team, football, in its turn, strengthened his self-assurance and the consciousness that he could rely on the team doing its utmost to back him up. That is what determined his leading role in ice hockey.

Such is Bobrov! But there was a chance that he might have given up the rink for the football field. That would have happened if just then ice hockey did not make an appearance and take its place side by side with Russian hockey, which has so many features of football that it is often called "ice football." This quite unique game required a special skill and turned recognized stars into timid and clumsy greenhorns. And with good reason, too! Imagine that instead of a spacious ice-field with plenty of room for twenty players, if need be, and where a wicker ball rolls lightly and softly, you are taken to a small rink, which, besides everything else, is completely enclosed by tall boards. Here, there is hardly any elbow room for as few as ten players and instead of a ball a solid rubber disc is passed around with lightning speed. And if such a puck hits you, it will seem to be made not from rubber but from lead.

At first, Bobrov thought he would have to begin from the beginning, that the training he had had in boyhood and all his mastery would serve him little in this game. He was not much of a player if he had no control over the puck. Only later did he realize that Russian hockey enriched ice hockey and made that game, which has an almost century-old history, unusually novel. The Czechs, who helped Soviet players master ice hockey, instantly noted how favourably it was influenced by Russian hockey.

Bobrov soon overcame his bewilderment and feeling of helplessness, traits that were totally alien to his character. He made the puck obey him. Well, he told himself, if necessary he would start learning from the ground up again. If the Canadians were playing ice hockey for eighty years and found pleasure in the game, if the Swedes liked it and scored substantial successes, if the Czechs unravelled its secrets and won the world title twice, surely it was not beyond the powers of Soviet hockey players.

And with every passing year Bobrov grew more and more attached to ice hockey. He went on playing with the Central Army Club football team, but always waited impatiently

Admiring fans

for the onset of winter when he could put on the "armour" of a hockey player.

The years of pupilage, when the new game kept nonplussing the most experienced players, were left behind. Its intricacies were mastered and it was funny to think there was a time when the players could not tear the puck away from the ice. Already in the 1948 season, the puck, driven by our ice hockey players, whizzed through the air like a small, well-aimed projectile. In the course of another two years the tactics of the game were perfected and the quintettes—fighting backs and forwards—ably selected.

The Army's first quintette, which was finally made up in 1952, became the strongest in the country. Every player splendidly supplemented his team-mates, stimulated them to greater effort and thereby improved his own game. With hard-playing, calm and fearless Alexander Vinogradov, a veteran in ice hockey, and young Pavel Zhiburtovich as

backs, and Victor Shuvalov, Yevgeni Babich and Vsevolod Bobrov as forwards, the quintette was invincible.

It built up its game on clever team-work. Zhiburtovich helped the forwards, Shuvalov, the centre-forward, supported the backs when they were hard-pressed, while Babich, playing on the wing, was Bobrov's right hand, as it were.

Quite a few major victories were won by the Army in U.S.S.R. championship contests and in matches with the foremost teams in Europe. But in December, 1953, it lost in the Urals, where the tournament for the country's championship began. Bobrov, who was studying at the Air Force Academy, was in Moscow and from the accounts in the newspapers fruitlessly tried to picture what was happening to his team-mates.

At first, there was a report that the Central Army Club was beaten by the Leningrad Officers' Club, and a few days later Bobrov read that his team-mates had suffered another defeat, this time at the hands of the Moscow Dynamo.

"I've got to join them," was the thought that gave him no peace. And, at last, the day came when his togs were packed in a suitcase and a plane ticket nestled in his pocket. A few hours remained before the take-off....

When Bobrov walked into the lobby of the Bolshoi Ural Hotel in Sverdlovsk, he saw his team-mates coming down the stairs. They, too, carried little suitcases and sticks tied in bundles. They were hurrying to the stadium for their game with the strong Krylya Sovetov team.

How happy they were to see the tall figure of their captain and how embarrassed they became when they glanced at his gloomy face!

"Well, come on, Vsevolod, we must be going," Said Yevgeni Babich making for the door, while the others silently shook hands with Bobrov and boarded their bus.

On the way to the stadium they spoke of trivial things as though they had not had two crushing defeats and their

team, the country's champion, was not on the fifth rung of the ladder....

An ice hockey match, excluding the stoppages, lasts an hour. That hour contained so many tense moments for Bobrov that there was more than enough of them for a whole ice hockey season. He watched the game from the stands.

... In the third period, the Army's goal was taken for the third time. But, somehow, Bobrov was sure his team would level the score. Indeed, during the last minute of the game, when the Army's first quintette was in the rink, Victor Shuvalov scored the third goal, and Bobrov, who was almost prostrate from exhaustion as though he had played in this hard game himself without a moment's rest, went to meet his team to exchange a silent handshake with them as they came off the ice.

They had a talk in the evening, when the first quintette gathered in the coach's room.

It was good to be together again, to look into the faces of friends in which every line was familiar, and to exchange a few sparing phrases every now and then. They did not need to say much to understand each other.

They spoke of Moscow, of scheduled international matches, about everything except what was uppermost in their minds. One and the same mute question stood behind every reflection. And that question was: "What's the matter with the quintette?"

Bobrov read that question in the eyes of Yevgeni Babich, who was always restrained and imperturbable. It shone through the sombre concentration of Alexander Vinogradov. And it could be felt in the fidgetiness of Pavel Zhiburtovich, who kept getting up and pacing the room.

Victor Shuvalov sat with bowed head and looked blacker than a storm cloud in spite of his being the hero of the game the team had just played. He was the one who finally came to the point.

"I think," Shuvalov said, "that the whole thing boils down to your not being with us, Vsevolod. We're called

a 'quintette,' but essentially we are parts of a whole. A unit! What happens when you subtract anything from a unit? You are left with fractions and not with a whole number."

This bit of unexpected eloquence from Shuvalov surprised everybody. Even Zhiburtovich, the young and most excitable player on the quintette, stopped pacing the room.

"Thanks, Victor, for your kind words," Bobrov said. "I can't picture myself without you either. But if you want my opinion, that fraction you spoke about has nothing to do with my absence. The quintette is falling to pieces because the backs and the forwards have stopped cooperating. Do you realize how dangerous that is with the Stockholm games ahead of us?"

"Are we going?" Zhiburtovich asked, springing up from his chair. "Has it been decided?"

"Some will go, others won't," Bobrov replied. "The Dynamo is going and so is the Krylya Sovetov quintette—they're playing a good game. As for us—the future will show."

"There's a business for you," sighed Babich. "It had to happen to us!"

"But what happened? Tell me," Bobrov asked him.

"People say it's my fault," Babich replied with a wry smile.

Bobrov glanced at the face of this veteran of the ice rink and thought: "It's like Babich to take all the blame on himself." But it was he, Babich, who never flinched during a game and selflessly kept the opponents' defence on tenterhooks without thought of personal danger. It was impossible to count the number of times he had sped right at the boards or the number of times he had been thrown on the ice by violent shoves. Babich was a real ice hockey gladiator, and during a game he played with the heart of a lion and was possessed by only one desire—to help a team-mate and get him into a position to score or to drive the puck home himself.

Always together. Bobrov and Babich

Babich had been playing on the same team as Bobrov right from the start. There is much in their characters and tastes that is common to both and their past is very similar, too. Babich and Bobrov are nearly of the same age and they learned to handle a hockey stick almost at one and the same time. Babich, like Bobrov, has an elder brother, who was a splendid hockey player. They joined the Army at the same time and attained the rank of major almost simultaneously.

"Plucky Makar!" is what Yevgeni's friends call him. But why did he get that nickname? Because his father was called Makar, or because of the Russian proverb which says: Poor Makar gets all the knocks? Yes, during games, Babich usually gets all the knocks. And yet quite a few people were blaming him for the reverses suffered by the Central Army Club's first quintette.

But Bobrov thought differently.

"We cannot blame anyone of us singly for our failures. The blame lies on each and every one of us," Bobrov said. "Our fault is that we've lost our team spirit and are playing separately, every man for himself. We must go back to our tried tactics. What always brought us success? Team-work! We've got to recover it. And the sooner the better. It has been decided to send a Soviet side to Stockholm. We'll contend for the world championship. Do you mean to tell me that our quintette will not be the first on the national team?..."

After that conversation, the Central Army Club never lost a game, but because of the two defeats it had already sustained, it had to rest content with second place in the country's championship. And when, after a series of international matches played at home and abroad, the U.S.S.R. national team boarded the plane for Stockholm, it included Vsevolod Bobrov, Yevgeni Babich, Alexander Vinogradov, Pavel Zhiburtovich, Victor Shuvalov, and their young team-mates—the backs Dmitry Ukolov and Genrikh Sidorenkov, the forward Alexander Komarov, and the goalies Nikolai

Puchkov and Grigory Mekertychan. Together with them, the plane was boarded by their recent opponents, who had forced so many unpleasant moments on them—players of the Dynamo and Krylya Sovetov clubs, who made up the second and third quintettes.

Only recently Kuzin of the Dynamo had sent the decisive puck into the Central Army Club goal, but now he was chatting with Puchkov. Not so long before, Bobrov was sitting on the stands of the Sverdlovsk stadium and, oblivious of all else, watching the Krylya Sovetov players—Bychkov, Khlystov, Guryshev and Kuchevsky—storm the goal of his team, but now these four young men looked up to him, their captain, for advice and support. Three rival teams were merged to form the national team of the U.S.S.R.

Vsevolod Bobrov and his team-mates had taken off for foreign countries on many previous occasions but they had never felt such a responsibility as was now weighing down upon them. On all former occasions they had played friendly games, but now they had to face the strongest teams in the world for the world title. In Stockholm they would have their first meeting with the Canadians, who had been world champions time and again. And no matter how much they had heard about these tall, strong and self-confident players, they could not form a clear and precise idea of their real strength. Well, they would not have to wait long now.

And the first people they saw at the Malmö Hotel, the venue of all athletes visiting the Swedish capital, were the Canadians. Indeed, they really did look as though they had been created for ice hockey: they were all alike—of fine stature and broad-shouldered.

"Proper he-men!" Babich said to Bobrov. "If any one of them gives you a shove you'll fly over the boards like a bird."

"You should talk about being scared of boards, Makar!"

"I never said I was," Babich grinned....

The next time they saw the Canadians was on the following day. While the Soviet team was training, the tall, well-built young men they had seen on the previous day unexpectedly appeared on the stands, bare-headed and wearing light coats. But just then, as bad luck would have it, the pucks were flying past the goal posts, the backs were making mistakes and getting into each other's way, and the coach, Arkady Chernyshov, stopped the routine over and over again. Some ten minutes later, Bobrov noticed the Canadians moving towards the exit. One of them laughed and waved his hand deprecatingly. "Oh, well, let them think we're not much of a team," Bobrov decided.

On February 26, the U.S.S.R. national team entered the lists. That day they played against the Finns and won 7 : 1. But what was that victory worth, when the Canadians virtually crushed the same team, sending the puck into its goal twenty times! Every success scored by the Soviet team was put in the shade by the more impressive successes of the Canadians. They crushed all comers by the power of their attacks and the little red lamp over the goals of their adversaries kept flashing the signal of disaster.

Vsevolod Bobrov and his team-mates used every opportunity to go to the stadium and attentively watch the game of the Canadians. Naturally, there can be no comparison between the speed of an aircraft and that of an ice hockey player. Nevertheless, there was something of a low-level flight in the movements of the players on the rink. Their very equipment showed that here men had to do with great speeds and that every step required virtuoso "pilotage," the steadiest of nerves and lightning reaction.

The hefty Canadians looked bigger still in their costumes. Special guards protected their Achilles' tendons, and fibre, felt and leather lined their costumes. Only their heads were bare, even here, in the rink; the Soviet team, however, played in leather helmets.

Quite often, the ice hockey games at the rink of the Royal Stadium in Stockholm reminded spectators of wrestling

matches, while the speed and the frequent feints made them think of bouts between boxers. The players would skate into the rink fresh, fit and alive with energy, but two or three minutes later they would leave the ice hardly able to drag their feet.

The more games they saw, the better Bobrov and his friends realized what the main trump of the Canadians was It was in their speed, which was greater than that of any of the other teams. Nobody else could carry out a manoeuvre with such swiftness or pass the puck with such accuracy in one movement.

All the Soviet players thought of their game with the Canadians, but before that meeting they had to defeat six teams, almost all of which were formidable opponents. The victory over the Czechs cost a tremendous effort, while after the Sweden-U.S.S.R. match hardly anyone doubted that the Canadians would retain the title of world champions.

The match with Sweden began at eleven o'clock at night. The sky was overcast and a snow-storm threatened to break loose. A tense struggle developed. The quintettes kept changing but all the attacks of the Soviet forwards were repulsed by the Swedish backs and goal-keeper. Bobrov strained himself to the utmost to score, but he was effectively blocked by two backs. Meanwhile, the Swedes managed to make an unexpected and exact drive—and the puck shot into the Soviet goal. The spectators, led by an employee of the stadium, who wielded a rod for want of a baton, cheered wildly as the figure I appeared on the score tower.

"Tumba, Tumba, Tumba," they shouted.

Tumba is the nickname of Sven Johansson and it became the Swedes' battle-cry.

It began to rain. This turned to hail and was soon followed by heavy snow. Now the Soviet team was attacked not only by the Swedish ice hockey players and the spectators but also by the weather. In less than a twinkling of an eye, the rink was covered by loose snow which hampered the game. The black puck disappeared in the snow more

and more often. The game had to be stopped for a few minutes in order to clear the ice. But the snow went on falling and when the match was resumed, the players found the going even harder than before. The rubber disc kept disappearing and the Swedes all drew back to defend their goal, striving to preserve their lead at all cost.

These were moments of inconceivable tension. Never before did Bobrov and his team-mates have to play under such circumstances. "Everybody forward," Bobrov called out to his team, bearing down upon the Swedish goal and coming to grips with the formidable backs. A few minutes before the end of the game, he passed the puck to Shuvalov, who directed it into a corner of the goal and it disappeared in a heap of snow....

Until the referee cleared away the snow nobody could tell if a goal had been scored or not. But when the black disc showed itself everybody saw that it was stuck in the net inside the goal. The Soviet side had scored and saved itself from defeat. The score was 1 : 1.

The team lost an important point. Prior to the game with the Canadians, which was to decide the championship, the Soviet team had one point less than their rival and, thus, only a victory could bring them the coveted world title. Meanwhile, it was enough for the Canadians to walk off with a draw to become world champions again. The situation at the stadium in Stockholm was the same as that during the memorable Central Army Club-Dynamo football match.

For players a decisive match begins much earlier than for spectators. Who said that an ice hockey game lasts one hour of playing time? For the participants it lasts hours that seem to have no end. It begins to devour their energy long before the crucial minutes when they would need every ounce of their strength.

"If only we score first, we'll have the Canadians on the run," Bobrov said to his comrades as the team skated into the rink, where the Canadians were already lining up.

1954 World Championship in Stockholm. Vsevolod Bobrov gets through the defence and outwits the goalie with his favourite feint to score the third goal

The referee blew his whistle, Bobrov's stick came into contact with the stick of Galand, and the puck was in the game.

What happened after that did not at once penetrate the consciousness of the spectators. With terrific speed, the Russian forwards carried the game into the defence zone of their adversaries. The puck flew towards the goal and the goal-keeper just managed to stop it. The Russian attacks followed one another in quick succession, a mad pace was set and one combination followed another. The Canadians

were so stunned that all they could do was to parry the puck wildly.

The Russians attacked along the whole width of the field. They collided with the Canadians, gave shove for shove, manoeuvred swiftly. But the score remained unopened. The third quintette joined the fray, and the Canadians threw in fresh reserves too, but the pace did not slacken. Khlystov and Guryshev were as dangerous as Babich and Bobrov.

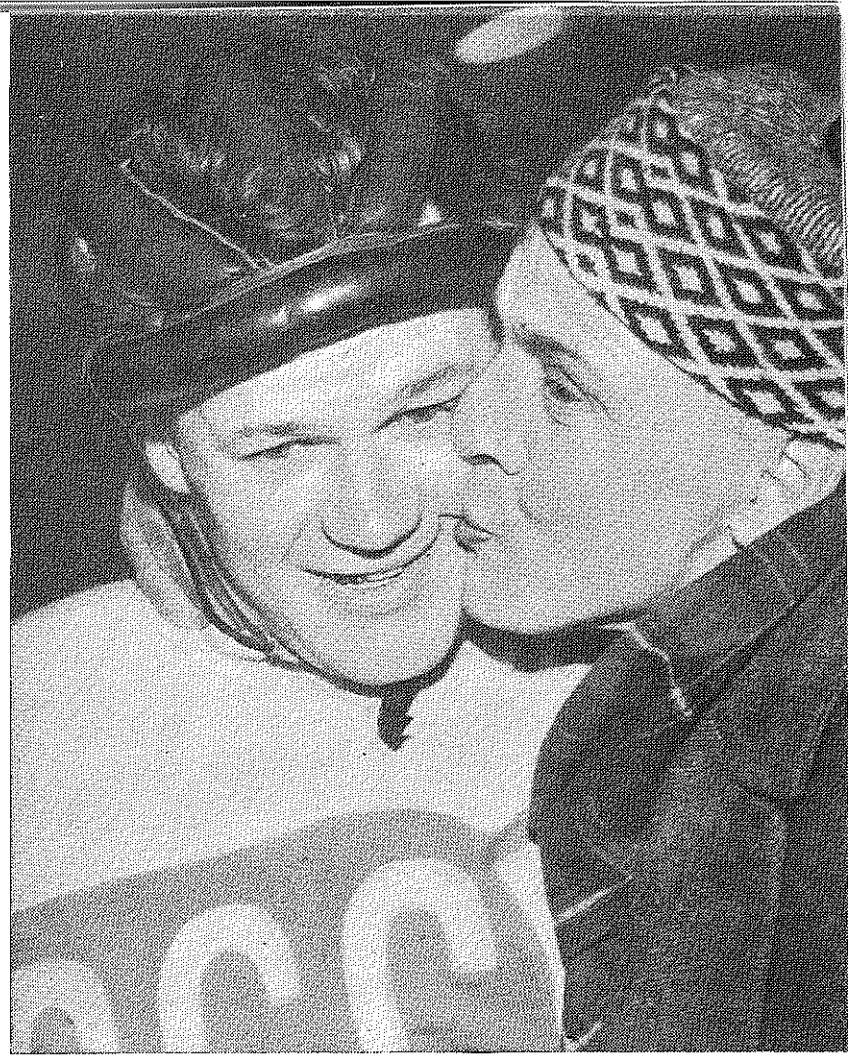
The game entered its fifth minute. An eagle-winged pass —and Guryshev scored. There was a deathly silence. The game was still young and the spectators did not believe the Russians would win.

The play of the Canadians grew fiercer and rougher. The referee sent one of them off the ice. Again substitutes came in. The Soviet first quintette took over: Ukolov and Kuchevsky in the defence, Shuvalov, Babich and Bobrov in the attack. And on the eleventh minute Shuvalov scored the second puck.

This goal, too, was met with complete silence.

The Canadians fought tooth and nail to take the puck out of their zone, but every time they did so it immediately returned. The goal-keeper, Don Lockhart, was in splendid form. He played a spectacular game, warding off what seemed to be certain shots. Then Bobrov, getting a pass from Babich, broke through to the goal. Lockhart rushed out to stop him. Feinting as only he knew how, Bobrov bypassed the Canadian goalie and with a short, calm drive sent the puck into the empty goal. That was when the stands first stirred and broke into thunderous applause.

Evidently, it was only then that the spectators realized what was really happening. The Canadians were losing! The Canadians were rattled! They could not take the measure of the Russians! And, as though to confirm this guess, the Soviet third quintette charged and Bychkov converted a pass from Guryshev to score the fourth goal. True, at the outset of the second period, Galand of the Canadians, shot a puck into the Russian goal, but in reply Bobrov raced



The Soviet team's masseur gives Bobrov a huge hug after the victory over the Canadians

up the wing and passed the puck to Babich. Without stopping, the latter sent it on to Shuvalov and a moment later the little red lamp came on to register the fifth goal.

That won the spectators over completely. "Bob-rov! Shu-va-lov!" they roared. "Bob-rov! Shu-va-lov!" And this cheer never died down for a single moment.

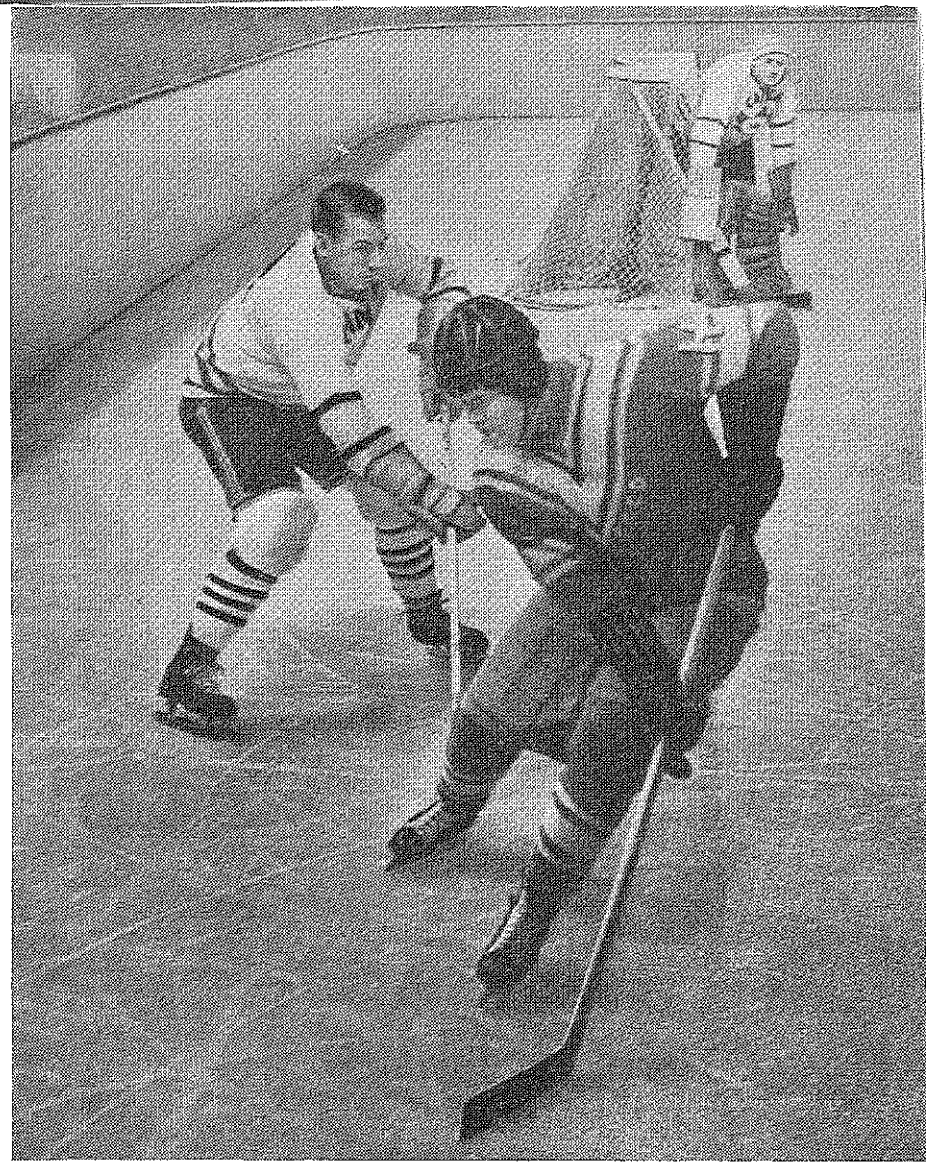
The sixth goal was scored by Kuzin of the Soviet second quintette. Five minutes later, Kuzin again stormed the Canadian goal and brought the score up to seven, while the Canadians retaliated with only one more goal.

Thus ended this match, which for a long time was featured in all its details by the press. That day, people in the Swedish capital spoke of nothing but the Russian ice hockey team and discussed the unprecedented beating it gave the Canadians. The names of the Soviet players, and particularly of Vsevolod Bobrov, were on everybody's lips.

...Russian faces are cast in a way all their own—a gentle oval, a snub-nose, and blue, friendly eyes. In a calm situation such a person seems unhurried and slow-moving. But in a minute that counts he is instantly transformed. Bright sparks flash in his eyes, his figure hardens, his movements become more collected and measured, and there is nothing that can daunt him. Tall, broad-shouldered and light and quick in his movements, he forces his way regardless of the obstacles. His comrades yield to his iron will. His swift attacks paralyze the most experienced backs. A smooth rolling stride carries him forward. His split vision is perfect and he reacts to all changes in the situation while sweeping along at top speed.

Such was the memory that Thomas Campbell, the captain of the Canadian team, took away of Vsevolod Bobrov, who was officially acknowledged as the outstanding forward of the world championship.

"The Soviet players made a fine showing in the last game," Thomas Campbell said after the match against the Soviet side. "We never thought ice hockey could be played like that.... We were beaten in the decisive game. We, Ca-



Bobrov in action...

nadians, were amazed at the Russian team's capacity for work and their ability to maintain an unusually fast pace. Undoubtedly, the best player in the tournament was the Russian forward Bobrov. He is in a class all by himself."

II

After the triumph in Stockholm, the Soviet team had to prepare for a new meeting with the Canadians. The Canadian press regarded the defeat of its team as a national calamity. The newspapers wrote that the players of Toronto's Lyndhurst, around whom the national team that had played in Stockholm had been built up, were much weaker than others in the country and that the Canadian Ice Hockey Association ought to send the best team it could to the 1955 championship. Presently, the news was received that the Russians would be faced by Pentincton, which won the Allan Cup and the national league. Reporters complained that they could not learn the names of the players who would strengthen Pentincton because all the sittings of the Ice Hockey Association were held behind closed doors. But they had received definite information that one of the questions on the agenda was the purchase of a few Russian ice hockey players, Bobrov, in particular, with a view to studying their style of play in greater detail....

And yet, in spite of its being already at the height of a sultry summer and although they were already training hard in preparation for the coming season and their new meeting with the Canadians, the players of the Soviet national team kept turning their minds back to Stockholm, to the struggle they had waged against the Canadians. They wondered what they would be up against in Krefeld, Dortmund, Düsseldorf and Cologne, the four towns in the Federal Republic of Germany, where they were scheduled to meet the Pentincton team. Would Bobrov retain the leadership of his team, seeing that one more year and a hard one at that had

passed, and there was the approaching challenge by the flower of Canadian ice hockey, who had carried off the gold medals of world champions fourteen times.

Reports virtually poured in from Canada. Grant Warwick, who had played on the strongest teams in the American-Canadian league, was made coach of the Pentincton team. Together with his brothers Dick and Bill, he would play as a forward on the first quintette. The team included many former professionals, who had long experience and were fast, indefatigable, and experts in rough play. That meant the Soviet team had to be ready for the most exhausting game it ever played, and that it had to put everything it had into its training.

Bobrov did not lag behind the young players. He made a great contribution towards his team's victory in the games for the U.S.S.R. championship, scoring the largest number of goals—25. He played in many important international matches. But when the world championship began and the Soviet team started its triumphant march without conceding a single point to the Canadians, Bobrov felt his freshness ebbing with every game he played. The tense season with its full calendar of games was making itself felt.

Already the second game of the championship, which was played against the Swedes, required every ounce of strength Bobrov could muster. A fierce struggle developed from the very start. Uvarov scored, but the Swedes immediately retaliated. The first and second periods were replete with mutual attacks but the score held. In the third period, Bobrov, Babich and Shuvalov turned one of their attacks to account and the match ended with a minimum lead in their favour—2 : 1.

Bobrov found it more and more difficult to keep all the threads of the game in his hands and to step in when the game was at its hottest. The short minutes of rest added less and less strength while the minutes of play seemed longer and longer. Perhaps nobody on the stands even noticed it. Bobrov remained his old self. He organized the

attacks, scored goals and bolstered up his young team-mates on the ice and on the benches during the rest periods. And perhaps Babich and Chernyshov were the only ones who saw what a hard time he was having.

The match with the U.S. national team was particularly difficult for Bobrov and Babich. It was the first encounter the Soviet ice hockey players had with the Americans and their rough and frankly dangerous game. That was when the old proverb about Makar getting all the knocks really fitted in. One of the American forwards, evidently infuriated by Babich's grit and coolness, caught him unawares and hit him in the arm with his stick, swinging it with all his might. Babich was carried off the ice, while Bobrov, although he played till the end of this match, which was won by the Soviet team, could not, like Babich, take his place in the quintette in the game against the Germans.

But on March 6, the day of the critical game with the Canadians, every member of the team was in his place. The Soviet side attacked as soon as the game started, pressing harder and harder. But it was the Canadians who opened the score. Another assault—and the second puck ricocheted off somebody's skates into Puchkov's goal....

What followed next became clear only later. Bobrov felt that the game of the Soviet quintettes was breaking up, that it was losing its purpose. He knew that the others had to be set an example, that at least one goal had to be scored in reply. But the first quintette was locked in a harassing struggle with the three Warwick brothers, a struggle that needed all their strength, so that they could do little to back up the other quintettes. And the result was 5 : 0! It was defeat for the Soviet side and an overwhelming triumph for the Pentincton team.

Neither the title of European champions nor the silver medals won in the world championship could take the bitterness out of that defeat. And nobody was interested in the full conviction of Bobrov and his team-mates that they could have won that match if they had not lost their heads

Senior coach Arkady Chernyshov with the European ice hockey trophy

but had held together and harmonized their play. Nobody was interested in the painful thought haunting the captain of the Soviet team that perhaps he would never again come to grips with the Canadians for the right to be considered the best in the world. Had the time come for him to relinquish his captain's band and pass it on to someone else who could replace him as leader? Had all that really come?

Back in the Soviet Union, Bobrov waited anxiously for the commencement of training for the new season, for a new meeting with the Canadians at the Winter Olympic Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo. Training began in summer without

any fuss. Once again Arkady Chernyshov, the Dynamo coach, took over the national side, and again the players of three clubs—the three best rival quintettes—were moulded into a team. With scrupulous care they studied the lessons that they drew from their defeat at the hands of Pentincton and worked out a plan of preparing for the match with Kitchener Dutchmen who beat Pentincton in the Allan Cup Tournament and, thereby, won the right to represent Canada at the Olympic Games.

The press gave the opinion that Kitchener Dutchmen were the best team Canada ever had in the past 34 years, while Bill Warwick, who had played against the Soviet team, declared that the Canadians would win the gold medals without much trouble. These fragmentary bits of news that came from across the Atlantic and were eagerly printed in the European newspapers had to be taken seriously. There was only one conclusion to be drawn and that was that the Soviet ice hockey players had to prepare for a game with a team that might really prove to be stronger than Pentincton.

Bobrov was unable to get down to training immediately: he was sitting for his exams at the Academy. But he kept in touch with his comrades and was abreast of all that the team was doing. He was responsible for the decision to advise the Central Army Club, the Dynamo and the Krylya Sovetov not to play in the home league until after the Olympic Games and to limit themselves to training and to friendly international games. Furthermore, it was decided to play a series of games with English professional teams made up of Canadians. That would give the Soviet side an opportunity to get a closer insight into the rough-house play and tactical manoeuvring of the Canadians. And although games with professionals were dangerous because of the risk that many of the Soviet players would be put out of commission, the team would have an invaluable advantage: a confidence that it would be able to withstand the throws and shoves of the Canadian Olympic team. It was better to take that risk

and bear it, for that would pay dividends in Italy. In short, it was decided to act on Suvorov's famous maxim that "hard training makes good soldiers."

At the beginning of October, when the team left for the German Democratic Republic, it was in fine physical form and well-knit. Following a session of painstaking training on artificial ice in Berlin, they went on to Britain, where they played two games with the Harringay Racers, who were strengthened by players from the Wembley Lions, and one with the Wembley team.

One glance at these ice hockey players was enough to see their style of play. Everything about their equipment was solid—the sticks, the heavy elbow pads, the shorts with hip guards, the gloves. Their costumes weighed up to eight kilogrammes or a little more than seventeen and a half pounds. In these accoutrements they looked like giants, like granite rocks set on narrow steel blades. And these men were as agile as acrobats, as fearless as boxers, and as sharp-eyed as snipers. They were quite sure they would make mincemeat out of the team of lightweights that had the impudence to come out against them. Indeed, they went all out to win, playing the most dangerous game they could and seeking to crush the Soviet team by furious onslaughts and accurate shooting. Vsevolod Bobrov was seriously injured but the game ended with the score of 11 : 1 in favour of the Soviet side.

The second game was played two days later. Getting on to the advantages of their opponents, the English ice hockey players scored four goals in a row. Bobrov watched the stormy attacks of the Racers from a bench. Again, as a year ago, when he had watched the charges of the Krylya Sovetov in Sverdlovsk, he thought: will they win back the lost ground to level such a big lead? But his team-mates not only caught up with their opponents but even scored a fifth goal.

That was a tremendously important victory. It showed that the team was well-knit and would not be unsettled so easily

as in the game against Pentincton. And when it won the third game as well, during which Khlystov and Uvarov were badly hurt, the Racers had to admit that the Soviet team would be a formidable opponent for their countrymen—Kitchener Dutchmen.

"You're all right," the Canadian professionals said, "but you haven't got enough punch."

"But you've got more than enough," the Soviet ice hockey players replied, "and the result is right here: we haven't got a full quintette in our team."

"We played a tame game," the Racers declared. "Kitchener Dutchmen would have thought we were playing chess. In Cortina you'll see what real punch is. It's all in the day's work—ice hockey is a man's game."

It only remained for the Soviet players to thank the home team for the warning. In any case, they knew what to expect when they decided to play against professionals.

In Paris they faced a picked Canadian team that lived in Europe. Twenty thousand people turned out for the match and roared with enthusiasm over every shot, every scrimmage. And when one of the Canadians sent Babich over the fence into the rows of spectators, their delight knew no bounds. A splendid "work-out" that was, a good test to see the stuff he was made of! Despite the injuries received by many of the players in the matches with the Racers, the Paris game was likewise won by the Soviet team.

Their next stop was Stockholm, where they played against the Swedes and against an English side they knew for the Ahearne Cup. The Soviet ice hockey players won that trophy. Then followed a series of games in Moscow against the second national Czechoslovak team, the Swiss, the West Germans, and the British. Then they played against a picked Austrian side in Vienna and three matches against the Swiss in Lozanne, Zurich and Berne. All these games, of which only one was lost (to the Swedish national team), were only preparation for the encounter with the world champions—the Canadians.

III

A warm sun and crystal-clear ice, rose-tipped Alpine peaks and deep, fluffy snow—such was the arena of the coming sports battle in the little Italian town of Cortina d'Ampezzo at the close of January 1956.

During the days that preceded the opening of the Winter Olympic Games, a mounting tension gradually took the place of the unhurried provincial life of the little town. That was felt particularly in the Hotel Savoy, which became the headquarters of sports writers. Sports reporters, who had met often while covering numerous contests in various countries, gathered frequently in the lobby, which was furnished with deep, comfortable armchairs. They divided their spare time between the high stools lining the bar and the armchairs in the lobby, exchanging opinions and impressions.

The most diverse viewpoints clashed here. Representatives of the Finnish newspapers held that everybody should be interested in the condition of the "great Veikko," as they called the skier Veikko Hakulinen. The Swedes spoke of nothing but the chances of Sigge Ericsson against the Soviet speed skaters. The French, Italians and Austrians maintained that "bobs," as they called bobsleighs, with slalom and downhill speed skiing, were the only events that were really interesting. The American sports reviewers went into raptures over the charms of figure skating. But all agreed unquestioningly that the main attraction of the White Olympiad would, naturally, be the ice hockey tournament.

In these discourses about the chances of the different teams, the plural was used infrequently. But then, nobody doubted that the Olympic medals together with the gold medals of world champions would be won by the Canadians.

On the morning of January 23, while looking through the fresh papers, the attention of the sports writers was arrested by an article in the French *L'Équipe*. It gave a

detailed analysis of the negative sides of the Soviet team. The newspaper said that the Russians were slow, reacted poorly to body play, and could not take long shots at the goal; that the new players had not yet grown accustomed to cooperate with the old-timers and that, as a whole, the team expected much too much from its leader, Bobrov.

This article started a heated argument.

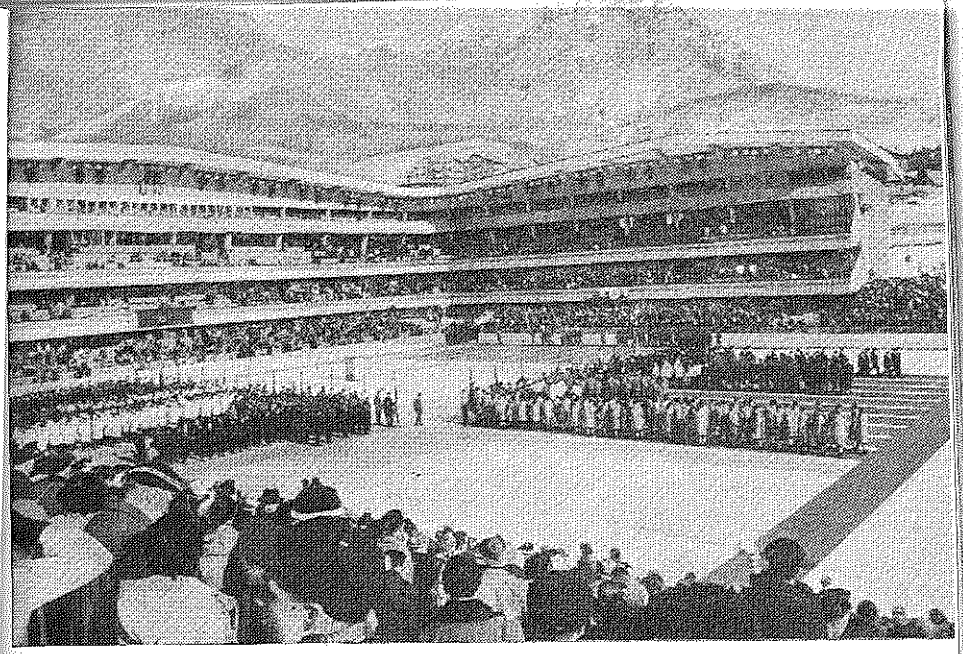
"But have you seen Bobrov this year?" a little, shrivelled-up old man, who had spent his life going from one competition to another, asked the two *L'Équipe* reporters, angrily shaking a little tuft of grey hair. "He's hardly played at all after the injury he got in London. You're still harping on what happened in Stockholm. You don't seem to realize that the 1954 championship was the swan song of that remarkable ice hockey player."

"So much the worse for the team that is still banking on him," said an American with a crew cut and wearing a checked cowboy shirt.

"Who told you that the team is banking on him?" the little old man exploded. "That's a dangerous delusion! Warn your team while there's still time.... Who's seen any new Russian players who have not learned to cooperate with the vetenams?... All of them have already played in Sweden and in Germany. Their quintettes play as one man and it's impossible to say which is the strongest—the first, the second or the third."

"Don't get heated up," said one of the Frenchmen. "We shan't have to wait long. You'll see that Bobrov hasn't given up his bid to be the star of the team. And let that worry the Russians and not us."

"What d'you mean?" the old man asked indignantly. "In my time, we bore the responsibility for the trustworthiness of our reports. We worried whenever we picked up our pens, yes, yes, worried. We knew that people believe us, that reputations and victories depended on our estimations. Bobrov is finished. Do you understand that? And yet you're writing



Opening ceremony at the Olympic Stadium in Cortina d'Ampezzo

that the team is counting on him. That's a bad, a very bad service you're doing."

"But why do you think he's finished?" the American asked in his serene tone. "Perhaps he's simply saving up on his strength if he's got so little of it left."

"What is this poor fellow saying? Listen to him!" the old reporter shouted again. "Bobrov saving up on his strength! The very thought of it is insulting to a man of his calibre. He has to be confident in his superiority, in his pos-si-bi-li-ties. Above all, he has to believe that he is the best player in the game, the master, the leader. The moment he sees he is no longer the master of his team, he'll go to pieces. That was made clear to him last winter by the Canadians. Everybody, the Russians included, can see that. He doesn't play any more. He's simply the honorary captain of a team which under his leadership once accidentally won the world

championship, that is all! And here *L'Équipe* writes that the Russians are staking all on their captain. Rubbish! That's what we professionals call this kind of information."

"Would you like to settle the matter with Bobrov himself?" one of the Frenchmen suddenly asked. "He's just gone past the hotel."

Everybody rushed outside, and Bobrov, who was taking a walk with Babich, found himself surrounded by newspapermen.

"Mr. Bobrof, two questions, please," resolutely declared the old reporter, occupying the most convenient position in a trice. He spoke fairly good Russian and only those who had heard him talk nineteen to the dozen a moment before could appreciate what an effort every phrase cost him. "May I? Thank you," and, shaking a copy of the *L'Équipe,* he said: "This newspaper thinks your team is depending too much on you! Do you agree with that?"

Bobrov was used to being bombarded by newspapermen and calmly replied:

"Our team is depending only on its own strength."

"Thank you. Now the second question. In Stockholm you were the best man on your team. How do you estimate your play today?"

"That's not for me to judge," Bobrov replied with a smile. "The wait ahead of us isn't long now. The games will show."

"That's a point in your favour," the old reporter said with delight. "Under the circumstances, permit me to ask just one more question."

"If you like."

"What quintette do you think is the best in your team? The first?"

"All our quintettes are equally strong, gentlemen...."

When the friends were some distance away from the Savoy, Bobrov said:

"You know, Yevgeni, if I had been asked that question

two years ago, I would have given the same answer but would have said to myself: 'Of course, our first quintette.' Today, I'm not saying that even to myself. Either we've become worse or our young players have become better, I don't know which, but today we're all equal."

"They tried to pin you to the boards. What do you think they wanted?"

"I imagine it's about a newspaper article. The old boy was waving some sheet.... Hold on.... What did he begin with? About me." And instantly Bobrov's face clouded over. "It's as clear as day! They're burying me! They think my swan song has been sung."

"What's come over you, Vsevolod?" Babich knew where his friend was vulnerable and it was something he understood and sympathized with.

Sooner or later all players think of the inevitable end of their careers, but who is there among them who can reconcile himself to it? Therefore, while thinking of it and appreciating its inevitability, every player defers his exit from the sporting arena to some very distant, abstract future, and the closer that future is the more far away it seems. And suddenly (that "suddenly" can never be avoided) he finds it almost staring him in the face and with that comes the knowledge that the end of the sporting trail had been reached.

"Burying me. They think I'm washed out, that I can't be depended on any longer," Bobrov said. "But even if we have become weaker, Krylov, Kuzin and Uvarov have become stronger. We're the men who taught them a thing or two. What of it if our quintette used to play a better game than the other two? To make up for it, it's hard to choose between our quintettes now! Am I right?"

Babich, who had grown accustomed to reading his friend's thoughts, knew that Bobrov was not arguing with the newspapermen but with himself. Once he had held that the game of the rest of the team should be subordinated to his own, that the team had to advance towards victory along the

course he would lay, but now he believed that his strength was in the strength of all the three quintettes.

And as though to confirm Babich's guess, Bobrov suddenly stopped in the middle of a crowded crossing and pointed to the five interlacing rings of the Olympic emblem.

"That's how our three quintettes are fused—try and break them apart.... Hell, it didn't occur to me to say as much to the reporters."

IV

For five days already the Olympic flame was burning over the "ice stadium." The names of the new Olympic title-holders had already resounded through the ether and been printed in newspapers a hundred times in all the languages of the world, but the ice hockey tournament was only just entering its decisive phase.

After the games in the three subgroups, six contenders emerged for the finals. The matches were played in the evenings and in the intervals the ice hockey players saw the lamps suddenly go out and plunge the packed stadium into darkness. Then, as though with redoubled brightness, the Olympic fire flamed up and, to the accompaniment of a melodious flourish of trumpets, the victors went up to the platform. Every day, the ice hockey players watched the presentation of Olympic medals. And, undoubtedly, each of them repeatedly asked himself: which of the ice hockey teams would climb the platform to receive the award of honour?

The platform was near the rink, but how far and difficult was the road to it! The Soviet team had already defeated the Swedes and their game with the team of the German Federal Republic had ended half an hour ago. But they did not leave the stadium. Did anyone imagine Bobrov and his team-mates would miss the Canada-U.S. match? Ahead of them were the games with these chief pretenders for the

Olympic and world championship! In a few days they would see these burly, strong men not from the secure seats of the spectators, but right in front of them on the ice, in the whirlwind of attacks, in fierce clashes.

For the Soviet players, today's game was so important, it concerned them so vitally that it was hardly possible to call them spectators. In the heat of the stormy engagements which would develop in a few moments, it was important for them to pick out the cardinal features in the character of each player on the two opposing teams. Much depended on that. Today, as never before, it was necessary to memorize every moment of the game, to remember how the best Canadian quintette started its attacks and what the position was in which John Mayasich, the American who had starred in the preceding games, preferred to shoot at the goal, to find out once and for all the strong points of Canada's leading back, the captain of the team Jack McKenzie, and what the American goalie could do.

The rows of spectators swayed rhythmically to the swing of a jazz tune coming over the loud-speakers. People shifted from one foot to the other—severe frosts had not spared this small town. People shivered with cold, drawing plaids over their shoulders and pulling their caps down to their very ears, and only those sitting in the expensive seats basked in the infra-red rays without feeling the cold. The ice sparkled with a frosted silvery whiteness, in the second tier of the stands the Canadian fans grew still, while above them the Americans met their team with loud cries and jingling bells.

Sitting close together, the Soviet players watched the game begin. A furious pace was set right from the start, the puck was passed back and forth swiftly—and before long the American forward John Mayasich shot the puck into the Canadian net. A goal!

While the American fans, who clearly had the support of many of the spectators, were cheering uproariously, Bobrov said to Puchkov:

"Kolya, watch that lad, notice how he shoots and from what position," and again riveted his gaze upon the rink, seeing everything: the unruffled coolness of the Canadians, their impetuous body play, and the heated scrimmages around the goals.

The tactics of the Americans were obvious—they had been unriddled long before: sudden bursts of speed, sharp counter-attacks, much in the manner of fencers. The Canadian defence was far too slow. It could not cope with the American forwards. It seemed to Bobrov that he could feel the heavy breathing of the Canadian backs and he estimated how they would feel in the tempest of the faster attacks of the Soviet quintettes. Just then Mayasich scored again.

The faster the game grew, the more apparent became the defeat of the Canadians. Who could have thought that the Canadians would lose? They were stronger than their opponents, much stronger. But they were losing! All their efforts in the second period brought them only one goal, but the Americans replied to that by scoring two more times in the last twenty minutes, thereby accomplishing what nobody thought possible: the Canadians lost. Now there were only two unbeaten teams—the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.

Stirred by what had just happened and full of impressions that needed an interpretation, the Soviet players went back to their hotel. The bus was filled with the buzz of conversation. They all spoke at once, ragged and laughed, and only Arkady Chernyshov, the coach, was immersed in thought.

The match had unexpectedly upset all his plans. The team's task in the U.S.S.R.-U.S. game now presented itself in a new light. Unquestionably, the Americans, inspired by their incredible success—this was the first time they had beaten the Canadians in a world and Olympic championship match—would play with decupled vigour. A victory over the Soviet team would be tantamount to winning the championship, considering that it was doubtful that the Czechs, the last team they would have to face, would be able to stop

them. Twice champions of the world, the Czechs were not playing at their best. In short, the defeat of the Canadians gave much food for thought....

The time-table of the ice hockey players differed greatly from that of the other competitors. While the skiers and skaters fought it out in the mornings, the ice hockey teams began their games in the evenings and returned home after midnight. For that reason, they got up the latest, about ten o'clock in the morning, and began the day with a stroll and an unhurried breakfast. After that they either went to watch the skiers and skaters or went to the polyclinic to have their scars looked to. Returning just before dinner, they analyzed the game they had played the previous day, received their instructions for the new match, put their togs together and set out for the stadium.

In the morning after the Canada-U.S. game, while they strolled along the mountain paths through a sunlit woods, their conversation centred around the victory of the Americans, who had unexpectedly become their allies. But yesterday's allies could become the most dangerous of rivals tomorrow. That was when they would need all their wits about them and all the strength they could mobilize.

During that walk in the woods, Bobrov remembered his conversation with the foreign correspondents near the Savoy. Was his team placing too much hope in him? That was what had interested the old reporter. With that question he had struck right at Bobrov's heart, at the heart of a veteran of innumerable battles on the ice. Had the team been put out of joint in the game with Pentincton precisely because its faith in its captain was too great? Could the game of the team—of its young but experienced players—continue to be based on that faith? No doubt, these questions were also raised by the people responsible for training the national team for the Olympic games, for a return match with the Canadians. And they did not arrive at the right conclusion at once. Perhaps that was why Bobrov had flown to Berlin to overtake the team.

But even while he had waited for the decision as to whether he should go or not, he had thought over many things and reconsidered his position in the team, where his recent pupils had become his equals. He had had much praise in his lifetime, had heard many words of admiration, but it is doubtful if he had ever experienced such elation as in the minutes when by sheer accident he overheard a conversation between the team's two coaches—Arkady Chernyshov and Vladimir Yegorov.

"I can't recognize Bobrov," Chernyshov said. "He's become softer, more cheerful. I wonder if it's because he's begun to trust others more and has correspondingly more respect for them. It's a pity he had that piece of bad luck in Britain. If he hadn't been crocked there, he would have worked wonders now. Just think, Vladimir, what we'd have had with his technique multiplied by team-work!"

"It's true, he's played too little this season," Yegorov said. "But let's hope he'll ride the storm."

There was nothing more in the world that Bobrov wanted after that than to "work wonders," to show everybody that it would be a mistake to exclude him from the team. And the next evening after the defeat of the Canadians, in the match against the Czechoslovak team, Bobrov and his friends of the first quintette gave a brilliant display of their former skill. Of the seven goals, five were scored by the first quintette. Following that victory, only the teams of the U.S. and Canada stood between the Soviet ice hockey players and the pedestal of honour. . . .

That day, when the whole of the noisy multi-national population of Cortina d'Ampezzo looked forward to a sensational match between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S., besieged the box-offices and discussed the chances of each team, there was the usual peaceful stillness around the hotel the Soviet players were staying in. As before, the hours of the long day dragged out unhurriedly in accordance with established custom. Before dinner, the team gathered as usual to analyze the game of the preceding day and to plan the match

it was to play today. The interpreter informed them of the press comments on the defeat of the Canadians. The Canadians, meanwhile, announced that they had not had their last say and would continue the fight for the championship.

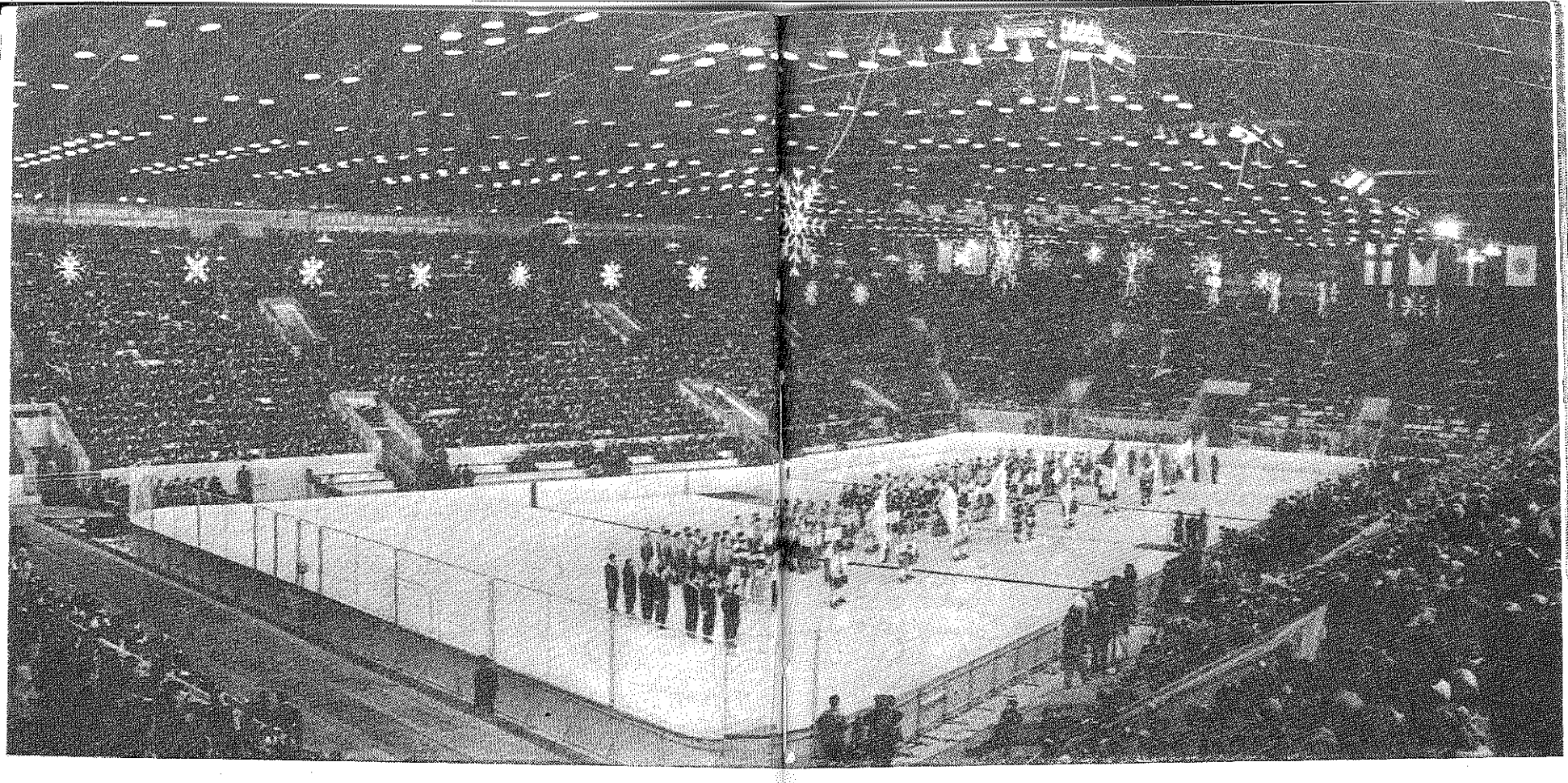
"That means they're sure we'll win," said Yuri Krylov, giving his comrades an affectionate glance. As always, he was calm and just a little shy.

"Where did you get that from?" the back Dmitry Ukolov asked him.

"Can't you see for yourself?" the third Dynamo forward, Valentin Kuzin, a young man with a round face and the profile of a boxer, said with surprise.

"It's quite obvious, I should say," declared Yuri Pantyukhov, who played on the Army team together with Bobrov, Shuvalov and Babich and was now replacing Bychkov on the national team's third quintette. Tall and dark, he was famous for his cheerful disposition and wit. "They want to pin the gold medals on their breasts with our hands. You beat the Americans and we'll beat you, and we'll look into the facts of the case when it's all over. You are pretty good and we're sure you'll beat the fellows who wounded us so sorely. That, dear friend Ukolov, is how you've got to understand the 'last say' of the Canadians. And do you know what's regrettable about this whole business? The fact that we really have to win," and Pantyukhov threw up his hands in mock dismay.

The problem of how to defeat the Americans was discussed long and painstakingly. Finally, it was settled that they would wear out their opponents. These two short words exhaustively defined everything—to wear out Bill Ikola, the splendid and perhaps the best goalie in the Olympic tournament, and the first-rate forwards John Mayasich, Weldon Olson and Gene Campbell, and the tenacious backs. But the thing was to exhaust the goal-keeper; his reaction was phenomenal and he was rock steady and daring, although to look at his small, thin body it did not seem possible that there was room in it for these qualities.



Opening Ceremony of the 1957 Ice Hockey World Championship in Moscow

Every player on the team was set a task and Bobrov watched how differently each reacted to the instructions he received from the coach. Yevgeni Babich, reserved and imperturbable, nodded silently. Selfless Yuri Krylov, who was always ready to do his best and, though nobody would have guessed it, played with an injured jaw protected by a piece of rubber, eagerly drank in every word Chernyshov said. Alexander Uvarov listened excitedly, his dark elongated eyes glittering as though he was already in a scuffle with Mayasich on the ice. Valentin Kuzin, whose defiance of danger got him almost as many battle scars as Babich, assented in a matter-of-fact manner. Nikolai Khlystov, a short, thin blond, who with mule-like stubbornness refused to reconcile himself to the fact that body play was not in his line, inwardly protested beforehand while he waited for what had become the coach's traditional warning not to play close to the boards. Genrikh Sidorenkov, who replaced Zhiburtovich in the defence, turned his swarthy, hook-nosed face to Chernyshov and, knitting his thick eyebrows and compressing his lips, was even now ready to join in the most dangerous of mêlées. While Dmitry Ukolov, companionable fellow that he was, repeated his usual "All right."

How different they all were and yet how they resembled each other. The hard man's game seemed to have ground their faces and characters in its own way, soldered them into one big homogeneous whole, where everything was intertwined and interlaced—Khlystov's dashing courage which galvanized his comrades into action like an electric spark, Alexei Guryshev's power and speed, Nikolai Puchkov's unyielding solidity, Victor Shuvalov's unbreakable optimism, and the perseverance of Nikolai Sologubov, who started out as a mediocre forward but developed into a brilliant back.

Which of Bobrov's characteristics did this living, pulsating organism have? The unbounded faith in himself that had helped him to score the decisive goal at the end of the last second in the football match against the Dynamo?

The steel will that time and again had transformed the quintette into a monolithic unit, a nucleus that their opponents could not split in spite of all their bombardments? The confidence that his mastery, of which he was so proud, benefited the team? What then? What? . . . No, you will never guess. A part of him throbs in the body of the team and feeds it with energy at such an inmost depth that it can neither be seen nor felt. But then, there is really no necessity to guess! He was needed by his team-mates, he would serve them for some time yet, he was still able to help the team settle the account for the beating it got from Pentincton—and that was plenty.

"I'm playing,—that's all that matters. I'm leading the fight, I'm needed," thought Vsevolod Bobrov as he sped on to the ice at that late hour, when only thirty minutes were left before midnight and not a single empty seat was to be found in the Olympic stadium.

At last, facing them were the American ice hockey players—fast-moving, big men, and their goal was kept by Bill Ikola, a small Finn, almost a boy. The sturdy accoutrements of the goalie emphasized his youthful thinness. The last-minute preparations were being made. The team's priest, an athletically-built young man, gave them his last blessings. The American fans roared with delight and beat gongs as their team appeared on the ice, while the players themselves surrounded Ikola and each strove to touch the goalie's leg-guards with his stick. Such was the invariable ritual of superstition.

Standing shoulder to shoulder in a line in the middle of the rink, the Soviet ice hockey players watched these proceedings. In a moment or two, the referees, both of them Swiss, would take up their positions—and time would begin to advance in a way in which a second would seem to be a minute, a minute—an hour, and an hour—a whole day. It is this very hour that decides the efforts of long months of strenuous training.

"We really have to win," was what Pantyukhov had said. The Americans were surprised that he was playing under the number 13. It would be interesting to know what the wag Pantyukhov would have answered if they had asked him.

Bobrov, sitting on a bench with his friends of the first and second quintettes, heard the referee blow a long blast on his whistle. Pantyukhov, Khlystov and Guryshev dashed towards the American goal.

The game started out at such a furious pace that it seemed as though the players had only one minute and not an hour at their disposal. There was no time even to change players and both teams sent in replacements singly without stopping the game.

Everything on the ice got entangled—the quintettes, the players. The Americans assailed Puchkov's goal with long, accurate shots from the centre of the field. The boards groaned under the impact of human bodies. The moment a Soviet player gained the puck, he was tackled by the Americans, who did all they could to wrest it from him.

The game grew rougher with every passing second. All the three quintettes had already come to grips with their opponents. And Bobrov, during the fleeting seconds of respite when a blanket was thrown over his shoulders, was ready to leap over the boards at the first signal from the coach and throw himself into the very thick of the fray.

The Americans were playing at their best, stopping at nothing and utilizing every tiny slip of their adversaries, and every time they attacked a storm broke loose in the stands. That frantic roar was probably heard on the mountain tops as well. The Olympic flame, as though in fear, leaned over the sides of the bowl it was burning in, but could not tear itself away. It was dark and frosty all around, but all the tiers of the stadium were filled to capacity. The people jumped and waved their plaids, flags, and thermos flasks with hot vermouth. The Soviet tourists chanted in unison "Well done!" whenever the Soviet side attacked.

It was time to go over to the offensive. The fire of battle, which was already eclipsing the light from the powerful lamps and growing more and more intense, needed refuelling. Ikola had not yet stepped into the game; the Americans still held the initiative.

It was quite plain now that they sought to win by fast counter-attacks, expecting that the Russian forwards would be unable to draw back quickly enough to defend their goal. But as yet they did not know what the Soviet backs were capable of or how fast the forwards were.

The Soviet team saw through the American plan. Getting used to the pace, they gradually took the initiative into their own hands. Now full quintettes and not solitary players skated out on to the ice, and Bobrov felt the turning-point drawing near.

"Give Ikola a work-out, or he'll freeze," he told the second quintette, when with a single movement they threw off their blankets and leaped over the boards. The next instant Tregubov sent the puck to the centre of the rink to Kuzin.

"Forward! Pass it to Uvarov—nobody's marking him." But Kuzin, the intrepid fighting man Kuzin, encouraged by the loud, jubilant cries of "Well done!" went for the goal himself. Ikola prepared for a save, but the American backs pressed Kuzin against the boards, forcing an "infight" on him. The back Sampson daringly went out to block him—and the danger passed....

The first quintette attacked. The game grew hotter for Ikola. He saved one shot after another, but the Soviet backs kept returning the puck to his goal....

The third quintette took over. Khlystov kept pushing up the wing, sending the puck now to Guryshev, now to Pantyukhov, who shot it at the goal. But the puck was caught by Ikola every time.

Bobrov and his friends returned to the ice. They rushed the goal of their opponents, but the Americans threw themselves at their skates and knocked the sticks out of their hands. The clashes grew ever fiercer. Suddenly, the referee

blew his whistle and sent one of the American backs off the ice for two minutes. That gave the Soviet team a good opportunity to open the score. But something extraordinary happened. The Americans had no intention at all of going on the defensive. As before, they kept attacking the Soviet players and used every opening they had to shoot at their goal.

The referee's stop-watch ticked off the seconds, but hard as they tried, the Soviet team could not turn their numerical superiority to account. Chernyshov, using the remaining half-minute before the fifth American returned to the ice, sent the refreshed third quintette into the rink. Rushing forward fearlessly, Khlystov led his comrades against the American goal, and the thunderous "Well done!" followed them without stop.

Even the backs joined in the storm. Ukolov took a shot at the goal. But Ikola was at his post. Khlystov sent the puck towards the goal with a sudden and accurate drive. But Ikola was at his post. Guryshev hurled the puck through the air towards the upper corner. But Ikola was at his post. His thin face was impassive and he held his head with its crew cut deep between his shoulders. Ikola was at his post, and it seemed as though nothing could shake him. His teammates, however, were clearly shakable. They let the Soviet players through to their zone more and more often.

"They want to tire us out by pressure play," Bobrov thought, but before he could share this guess with Chernyshov, the latter ordered the team to avoid body checks and to go over to short and quick passes.

The coach's eyes wandered to his watch with increasing frequency—the first twenty minutes would be up soon. Yes, that was the whistle ending the first period. The teams left the ice. There were ten minutes of rest before them: Rest? No, in a match such as this there can be no pause. There is hardly enough time to think over everything, to thrash everything out and to draw up a plan of action for the second twenty minutes....

And while the spectators warmed themselves by hopping on one spot, and while the heralds sounded their bugles, announcing the appearance of new Olympic champions on the pedestal of honour, there were hurried exchanges of opinion in the dressing-rooms.

Nobody argued in the dressing-room of the Soviet team: everybody agreed that the Americans had become the victims of their own intentions. They wanted to tire out their rivals—but, instead, they became tired themselves. The weak spots in the American team were quite evident now. They were inferior in speed and manoeuvrability. Their sole principle was to push forward, while the Soviet players based their game on calculation. The opportunity to open the score had presented itself already during the first period, and now the task was to prevent that opportunity from slipping away in the second twenty minutes.

"Well, good luck, boys," Arkady Chernyshov said, embracing each as they filed out. "Avoid body play, carry on the game at the maximum speed, and keep worrying Ikola."

The game was resumed. Once again, the Americans tried to get close to their opponents, to pin them to the boards, to knock them down on the ice, to injure and crush them, and to use every chance they had to counter-attack. But what had been possible with the slow-moving Canadian backs, was now out of the question. The Soviet backs were faster than the Americans. They effectively shielded their goal and kept feeding the puck to their forwards. The American goalie was having an increasingly harder time of it. He was particularly harassed by the forwards of the third quintette.

Bobrov had only just come off the ice, had not yet recovered his breath, but was already back in the sway of the dizzy rhythm of the attack. And even now, on the bench, he could not calm his breathing. He felt as though he were still right there, on the ice, where Pantyukhov was piloting the assault. The courage and energy of that short and not

very strong man was amazing. He seemed quite undersized beside the huge Americans, but the sparks of his energy infected everybody around him, and Guryshev synchronized his play with that of Pantyukhov's to perfection.

Just then Khlystov broke through to the goal, passed the puck to Guryshev, but again nothing came of the combination. A few seconds later, Tregubov sent the puck towards the goal with a terrific drive and it was all Ikola could do to parry it. Again Guryshev took a shot at the goal—and Bobrov had difficulty restraining himself from throwing his stick to correct the direction in which the puck was flying—Ikola was invulnerable!

At a signal from Chernyshov, the forwards of the first quintette sprang to their feet and swung themselves over the boards, while those of the third quintette, spent and breathing with short gasps, sat on the bench. The backs, Tregubov and Ukolov, went on playing. They had enough strength left to continue the struggle.

The referee blew his whistle. Forward! And Bobrov, manoeuvring with the speed of a thunderbolt, avoiding a collision with the fast-moving players, seeking out the most convenient position, weaving the web of the assault together with Babich, who was racing up the other flank, and revelling in the bracing words "Well done!", which thundered across the now silent stadium with renewed force, swept into the zone of the Americans.

"We've got to score. Why shouldn't we score this first goal? Somebody has to start the ball rolling, so let it be us, and the boys will take it up. Let it be us!"

Babich had the puck.... He got by one of the backs. He would send the puck over in an exact pass, which at this speed made the rubber disc almost invisible. Bobrov knew. He already felt the weight of the puck against his stick. But what was that? Babich was lying on the ice. He had been knocked off his feet, roughly knocked off his feet by one of the American backs, and the next moment the referee sounded his whistle. He held up two fingers, showing that for the

next two minutes the Americans would have to play as a quartette.

Soon after one of the Americans had been sent off the ice for fouling, the forwards of the third quintette came back into the game. And again, sitting close to Babich, Bobrov watched the events develop from the other side of the boards. They had not managed to make Ikola recover the puck from the net, but to make up for that the younger players could do it much more easily while only four of the Americans were left to face them. He was sure they would do it.

Sidorenkov started the attack. Calmly and accurately, he passed the puck to Pantyukhov, and the latter, outplaying two Americans who rushed to tackle him, carried the puck up along the right wing and broke through to the goal. "We really have to win," was what Pantyukhov had said. "Well, go ahead and win!" An American back closed in on him. No, it was too early to shoot. The goal was screened not only by Ikola but also by the second back. "Pass the puck to Khlystov! Shoot across the goal mouth!" Bobrov shouted inwardly, and Pantyukhov seemed to hear his captain. He shot the puck along the goal—and all Khlystov had to do was to intercept it with his stick to change its direction.

Bobrov neither saw the little lamp coming on over the goal of the American team nor heard the frenzied shouts of "Well done!" from the stands. He was embracing Babich, his old friend, sharing his joy over that first goal with him. Had there not been a bit of their work as well in that goal? It made no difference if it was scored by the younger men and not by them; the result was the same: the U.S.S.R. team was in the lead.

That happened at the end of the fifteenth minute. The Americans counter-attacked savagely in the course of the next two minutes. Campbell took a shot at the Soviet goal. Olson tried to beat the Soviet goalie. No sooner was the puck driven out of the danger zone than it came flying back. Two American forwards sped towards Puchkov, but Tregubov threw himself at their feet.

Bobrov knew that this burst of energy must soon fizzle out and he wanted to join in the game before the fever of the American attacks dropped. This was just the moment to break into their zone. Without waiting for the coach's signal, he threw off his blanket, pulled on his gloves and, gripping the board with his body taut and stretched forward, was ready to vault over it. But why was Chernyshov dilly-dallying? At last! And after the next assault by the Americans, Bobrov received the puck and found himself face to face with Ikola.

He did not shoot at once, but waited for the goalie to leap forward. Now? No, it was too early. But at the same moment that Ikola sprang forward and Bobrov's stick was already in the air, the Soviet forward was attacked by two players....

Bobrov remained cool in spite of this bitter disappointment. Two years ago he would have been raging mad over such a miss, but today he knew that where he failed to increase the score others would do it for the team.

The intuition of the Soviet national team's captain did not deceive him. The spirit of the Americans was broken, their strength was ebbing. Only two of their forwards continued to attack. The pace, which did not slacken for a moment, was too high for them. They were tired. But they were still dangerous. And, just then, that danger loomed large. Ukolov was sent off the ice. The whole American quintette threw itself at the Soviet goal, striving might and main to realize the advantage.

The full burden of defending the goal fell on the forwards of the third quintette and they coped with the task splendidly. Pantyukhov took command over the puck and hard as the Americans tried they could not tear the net woven by his exact passes. And when the two minutes were up, the first quintette resumed the offensive. Bobrov, Shuvalov and Sologubov kept the American goal under fire, but the small Finn guarding it was at his post as before.

Four minutes of play were left when Bobrov, Babich and Shuvalov took over from the forwards of the second quintette. Things were coming to a head. Bobrov felt that with every fibre of his being. Intercepting a pass, he sent the puck forward to Shuvalov. The latter passed it to Babich. There it was, the storm was swelling. An American back tackled Babich, and Bobrov waited for the puck.

The next moment he saw Babich continuing his advance but without the puck. It was lying unnoticed on the ice, and at once Bobrov pounced on it. "I mustn't look up at Ikola. The goal is empty! Off you go into that left corner!"

And in the split second while the puck was making its four-metre-long flight and Bobrov was carried against the goalie by his own momentum, he knew that the rubber disc had landed in the net.

That was how the second goal was scored.

Now the Soviet players all drew back. The Americans would make their last desperate bid to retaliate! Here they were! Clary was threatening Puchkov's goal, but he could not get past the defence....

Half a minute before the end, a fast combination by Khlystov, Guryshev and Pantyukhov gave the Soviet side its third goal. After that the forwards of the second quintette came into the game, and Kuzin scored the fourth goal.

When the referee blew his whistle to announce that the game had ended, Ikola, unshakable Ikola, threw his stick on the ice in a fit of temper and left the rink empty-handed. Meanwhile, the stadium, shouting in unison, followed the Soviet team with a booming *"Mo-lod-tsy"* ("Well done!"). And people of many nationalities added their voices to those of the Soviet tourists. Many of them probably did not know what *molodtsy* meant, but they felt that at that moment it was the only word that could adequately express their admiration.

V

Victory! That happiest of words in sport was repeated by each member of the team in his own way, both aloud and to himself. But nobody felt relieved. They had won but the palm leaf was still not theirs. Twenty hours from now this very same rink would be the scene of the final match of the Olympiad, the match between the U.S.S.R. and Canada.

The Canadians did indeed have an opportunity for a last say!

The calendar was definitely favouring them. They had 36 hours of rest before that decisive game, while the Soviet team, after two tense matches, had only twenty hours in which to prepare themselves.

After the victory over the Americans, it would be enough to bring off a tie or to lose to the Canadians with a difference of two goals to win the Olympic championship. But it would be ridiculous to begin the struggle with a team such as Kitchener Dutchmen with the hope of ending it in a draw. It was quite enough that after the two preceding world title games with the Canadians the number of matches won and lost and the number of goals scored were tied at 1 : 1 and 7 : 7. No, they had to win, in spite of their fatigue, in spite of the forecasts in the press....

"We must win," Bobrov said to his friends as they strolled in the pine woods next morning. But the strange thing was that his ears were still ringing with the jubilant shouts of the spectators, the sharp cracks of the sticks against the puck, the grinding of skates.... It was simply that he needed a rest, that he had to recover his strength, for now not twenty but ten hours were left before the game started. But so far as Bobrov was concerned, the ten hours that had already passed seemed like ten minutes, a spell of rest between two periods of one and the same match. He could not discard the feeling that the game had not ended. He felt as though the Canadians would simply replace the Americans on the ice. That worried Bobrov. He looked gloomy

and was annoyed by the stillness of the woods which was filled with the fragrance of pines and by the merry laughter of his younger comrades. He maintained an obstinate silence and kept looking at his watch. He wanted to lie down and go to sleep. Perhaps that would disperse the silly feeling that the match was still on, that in spite of all rules its fourth period would begin in ten hours, and that though he was dead beat he would have to carry on against the fresh Canadians.

The Canadians had a great advantage. They had not used up all their energy on the eve of the game. A defeat would push them down to third place. How would they play?...

"How do you think they'll play?" Bobrov asked Babich, and the latter, as always, guessed his friend's mood and what he was thinking about (at the moment he was feeling much as Bobrov did). He answered light-heartedly, with a careless shrug:

"Think back to the games in London and Paris. They'll try to crush us, but they'll wear themselves out first."

Babich himself did not believe what he said, but his first thought was to calm his friend.

"The first ten minutes will be difficult," he added, noticing Bobrov's sceptical smile, "but after that we'll have it our own way."

"I wonder which of our quintettes will make the best showing today," Bobrov said, pretending he was satisfied with Babich's reply. "The third quintette bore the palm yesterday, while we played first fiddle in the game with the Czechs...."

"So that leaves the door open for the second quintette," Babich declared. "Look at the fun they're having." And he stopped to watch Krylov, Kuzin and Uvarov throw snowballs at each other. "They're none the worse for it. A bit of sleep and a good meal—and they're so full of energy they're fit to burst."

"You don't know how much I want that game to be played well," Bobrov confessed, "you know, really well, like in Stockholm."

"I'm sure it will," Babich assured him as though he did not understand that Bobrov was speaking about himself and not about the team. "You'll see how we'll play. After yesterday's match the boys are full of go. The devil himself won't stop them now."

... The anxious day dragged out slowly and yet unnoticeably. The team analyzed yesterday's match and received the instructions for today's game. It seemed that Chernyshov shared Babich's opinion. He said that it was important to withstand the first onslaughts, that the Canadians would undoubtedly do their utmost to check the movements of the forwards, to wear them out and thereby deprive them of their chief advantage—their speed, that the backs would have to exert every nerve against the Canadians' expert puck-carrying, and that Puchkov would have to be ready for sudden and accurate shots from the most unexpected positions.

The team kept rigidly to its established time-table: they had their dinner, went for another walk, and made ready to go to the stadium. But Bobrov could not get rid of the feeling that he was in the dressing-room waiting for the ten-minute rest period to end.

In the bus, he scrutinized the familiar faces around him, listened to familiar voices. Here they were, the young players—his hope; he would do all in his power to help them win, and they, in their turn, would help him play a good game.... Had he not felt an influx of new strength when he began to have faith in his team-mates? Then why should he be apprehensive now?

... A festive spirit dominated in the stadium as on the day the Winter Olympic Games opened. Heads kept poking out of the little windows of the radio commentators' cabins. The only empty seats were in the president's box.

The winter fiesta was nearing its end. Everybody had had their fill of the games: the tourists were tired of the countless contests, the inhabitants of Cortina d'Ampezzo were tired of the tourists, and the competitors were tired of

both. Today, they would witness the last eruption of the struggle. If only it would start soon! Everybody burned with impatience—the spectators and the players. But it was still too early. More and more people poured into the stadium, jamming all the entrances and forming a solid mass of humanity. Their breaths rose into the dark sky in gay little clouds. The game had not yet begun, but from the stands the Canadian tourists were already cheering, waving national flags and blowing horns.

"They're tuning up," Bobrov thought, "just like we are." He and his team-mates had just finished warming up. By force of habit he saw not only to his stick, skates and shoulder pads, but also to his inner "accoutrements." Everything seemed to be in order, the indisposition that he had felt during the day was gone. His nerves were taut but his pulse was calm.

Bobrov had played in games where tension had reached an unbelievable pitch. But he felt that what would happen now would outbalance all that. All he hoped for was that his strength would last and that he could forget that twenty hours ago he had already given all he could to make victory certain. Yet how could he forget? Twenty hours was too short an interval between two matches.

Bobrov saw the squat figure of Floyd Martin, with whom he would come to grips time and again in front of the goal; Donald Rope, whose face was fantastically marked with bruises; the huge Jack McKenzie, the Canadian captain, wearing a red knitted cap; Kenny Laufman with a bandaged head; Gerry Theberge, Bob White, Charlie Brooker—strong, heavy-shouldered men, stamping their feet with impatience, and already eager to start the attack....

A minute later the puck was already in play and, without losing the tiniest fraction of a second, the Canadians rushed the Soviet goal. The second quintette was on the ice; the backs were Tregubov and Sologubov.

They would have a hard time, a very hard time! Two Canadians advanced on Tregubov. He sent the puck to Solo-

gubov. The latter passed it forward to Krylov. But Krylov was knocked down. He and the Canadian sprang to their feet simultaneously. The sticks creaked, human bodies clashed. "The thing the London players spoke about will happen now!" Bobrov told himself. It was just as he thought! The referees were already sending one of the Canadians off the ice. The four remaining players continued the pressure. They managed to be everywhere. They resorted to body checks. Again they pressed the Soviet players against the boards. Again a Canadian was sent off the ice. This was the time for the third quintette to attack. But they could not slow the Canadians down.

Once again the full quintettes were in the game. Puchkov found himself under heavy fire, with the puck whistling through the air at him like a cannon-ball. The Soviet goalie was hard-pressed parrying shot after shot. Replacements were made without stopping the game. Sticks flashed in the air, the players seemed to be engaged in a mad dance; there was only one name for what was taking place in the rink—pandemonium. For the players the boards no longer existed. Even while Bobrov sat on the bench for substitutes he felt he was still playing and when he rushed out to replace someone, he had no time to throw off his blanket—it was taken off by the coaches as he sped past them.

During a moment of respite, Babich breathed into his ear, gasping out the words—there was no other way of making himself heard:

"Well . . . what . . . did I say . . . we . . . must . . . hold . . . out . . . for . . . ten . . . minutes. . . ."

The game was in its fourteenth minute. Although the Canadians were not playing as roughly as could have been expected—evidently, they had no liking for the penalty bench—they kept pressing towards the Soviet goal, bombarding it from afar with unrelaxing force.

But the fiercer the attacks became, the calmer the Soviet backs played and the more irresistible was Bobrov's desire to start assaulting the Canadian goal.

Opening the score against the Canadians

"It's important to show them that we're not routed. They probably won't like it," he told himself, and, turning to Shuvalov and Babich, said:

"Go for the goal as soon as you're out there."

The forwards of the first quintette leaped over the boards. They got into the swing without losing a moment. Where was McKenzie? There he was, some distance away in his little red cap. Babich was unmarked.

But Babich tore away so quickly that neither Bobrov nor Shuvalov could support him. He fought an unequal battle. To the accompaniment of a deafening roar of the Soviet tourists he outplayed one Canadian, then another. . . .

Bobrov raced forward. But it was too late! Babich was knocked down. The Canadian forwards drove the puck to-

wards the Soviet goal.... Good lad, Sologubov, he stopped them.... It was just as Bobrov expected—the Canadians were worried. Again they started to play a rough game. They hit out with their sticks....

When a Canadian had to leave the ice, Bobrov and his comrades let the second quintette take over.

"Follow up that advantage! There are more of you! Forward! Attack!" But the attack did not come off. When, when would it be started? Again there were five Canadians on the ice. One after another they made a thrust at the Soviet goal. But they were no longer the same men, by far not the same.... What about the Soviet players?

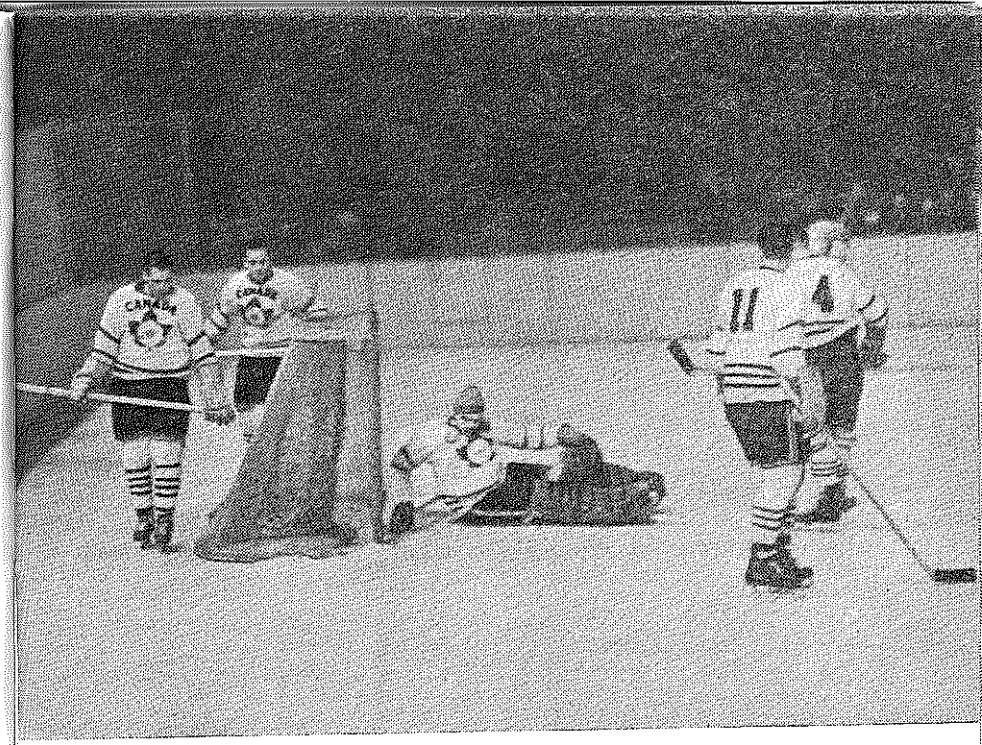
Bobrov glanced at his team-mates. The two reserve quintettes were sitting on the bench, their bodies bent forward, their chins resting on their sticks. "No, we're the same, and the hardest part of the struggle is over."

...Throughout the ten-minute rest period, Bobrov drummed that into the heads of his comrades. The Canadians were confused, he said. The Soviet team had to seize the opportunity. But when the game resumed—nothing changed. Pressure play raged supreme and every shove held out the danger of somebody being crippled. The boards creaked under the weight of human bodies and smashed sticks flew in different directions.

The Canadians had to be checked! Where were the eyes of the referees! No, the referees saw everything.

Again one of the Canadians was sent off the ice. The next moment Sologubov broke the rules during a fierce scuffle and was penalized. The numerical advantage was lost....

All the efforts of the Soviet team seemed to be in vain. Bobrov's body ached from the collisions and from passing and shooting the puck. It became more and more difficult to restore his wind. The game was really only beginning, but for a few times already he had left the ice without waiting for the rest of the quintette. Floyd Martin had not been wasting his time, and neither had Jack McKenzie.



The second goal

"If only my leg doesn't let me down; damn that match in London. Yes, this is no game of chess. The boys were right."

Thoughts raced through his mind in time with the game, but his eyes were fixed on the human whirlwind on the ice. It seemed as though this whirlwind had lost some of its force. Or did he only imagine it?

No, it was not his imagination—the Canadians were cutting their speed. Why hadn't he seen it before? They were no longer pressing with three forwards. More and more often only two forwards attacked and the backs entered the middle zone less frequently and kept the puck longer. What minute was it? The seventh. Well, second quintette, your moment had come.

"Speed, speed and more speed," Chernyshov shouted after them. "Pass more."

"Uvarov! Well done!" And as these words broke out from Bobrov's lips they were caught up by the Soviet fans.

"Well done!" This cheer shook the stadium, drowning the cries of the Canadian tourists.

With a burst of terrific speed, Uvarov broke into the Canadian goal area.

"Surely he'll not let himself be brought down this time! Where's Kuzin, where's Krylov? There they are! My leg hurts.... To hell with my leg!" Uvarov outplayed a back. The latter aimed at his stick and knocked it out of his hands. It was all McKenzie's doing. With the full weight of his huge body he threw Uvarov on the ice.... But.... Good lad, what a good lad!

It seemed that the kick with which Uvarov had managed to send the puck within reach of Krylov's stick had wrenched the ear-splitting roar of "Well done!" from the depths of the ice. It rent the air over the stadium and merged with Bobrov's cry:

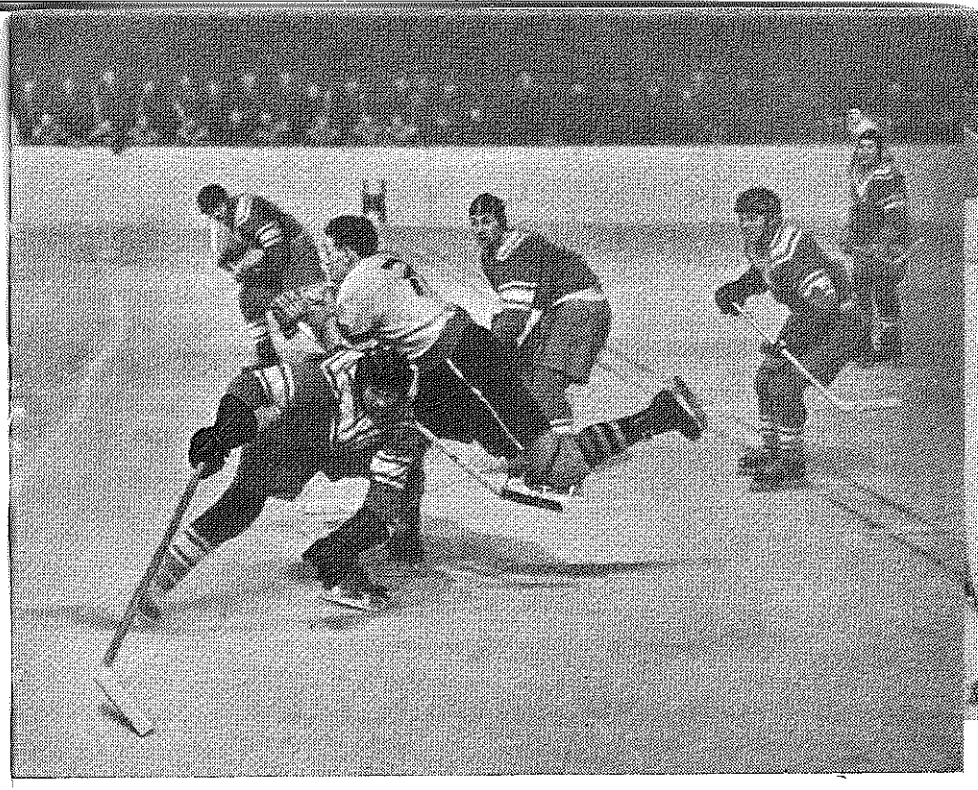
"Shoot!"

And Krylov, dear, shy Krylov, took a shot at the goal.

Can the flight of a bullet be followed? Is there an instrument that can do it? But the referee standing behind the goal sees where this flight ends—in the net of the goal, and switches on the little red lamp. From the other end of the rink, Puchkov saw the puck land in the Canadian net and he clumsily cut capers, swinging his broad stick. Meanwhile, Babich, smiling and exulting, embraced Bobrov and shouted in his ear:

"I told you—the second quintette...."

It is impossible to count the number of times Bobrov successfully consummated an attack and saw the puck, driven by his strong hand, twist and toss behind the goalie's back as though it were alive. But he had never felt so jubilant as he did now. It was all he could do to keep himself from jumping up and adding his voice to the gleeful cheers of the



Nikolai Sologubov, who received a special prize in the championships of 1956 and 1957 as the world's best back, blocks a Swedish forward

Soviet tourists. But it was too early for rejoicing. The game was continuing and the Canadians were trying desperately to even up the score.

"Help the backs," the coach said, sending the first quintette on the ice, "use every opportunity to counter-attack. Don't slacken the pace."

But it required a superhuman effort to hold to that pace. Bobrov felt his wind failing him. Oh, that match of yesterday! But in spite of everything, the first quintette attacked relentlessly. Replacements came in. The third quintette tore out on to the ice. Bobrov hurried to the bench; he did not want to miss anything.... What happened? Sidorenkov

pushed a Canadian with his hands and was penalized for two minutes. Would the team fall back to defend the goal? No, they attacked as before. Good lads! And again the same instant that these words came to Bobrov's lips, they resounded over the entire stadium, and the thunder of the cheer did not abate throughout the whole of the two minutes.

The first quintette took the field when only three minutes were left before the period ended. This was when experience, cool heads and an ability to see the field were needed. The Canadians would try to storm the Soviet goal. The Soviet players had guessed right. The pace was at the same pitch as when the game had started. Puchkov had a busy time. Now the puck was beyond the goal, now it bounced off the boards like a billiard ball and flew at the net. Danger! Puchkov would never reach it! With a bound, Babich threw himself beneath the stick of the Canadian forward and with a swing it was brought down not on the puck but full at his chest.... Was that the end of the game for him? No, no, he was on his feet again, selfless Makar!

And, as though in reward, the siren sounded—it was time to take a rest.

A rest? No, it was not the kind of rest that was needed. The minute the eyes closed it seemed that somebody's hand was furiously turning the handle of a movie camera. The pictures moved in quick succession. The cameras of the Italian cameramen shooting the Olympic picture *White Olympiad* still contained undeveloped films, but in Bobrov's head the whole picture was ready although it still wanted the hand of the producer.

There were a full twenty minutes of play ahead. Bobrov's leg hurt him.... His body ached.... Babich was lying beside him and rubbing his bruised chest. But when Bobrov opened his eyes, Babich said with a smile:

"You see, I was right—this game belongs to the second quintette...."

The ten minutes were up, it was time to resume the match. The Soviet team made for the exit of their dressing-room.

Then and there the new champions formed a group with their coach...

But they were informed that the ice was being refreshed. Was there any necessity for that? Had the Canadians asked for it? That explained a lot. Ten minutes had not been enough for them, they needed more time in which to recover. It was a good sign. It meant they were even more tired than the Soviet players.

The honour of beginning the third period was given to the second quintette. Good for Chernyshov! He knew that it was necessary to ride that quintette's eagerness to follow up their success. Right from the start, Uvarov carried the puck into the Canadian goal area. Two of his team-mates were ready to receive a pass from him. Who should he send it to? Krylov? No, he was marked. Kuzin? Yes, Kuzin. And Kuzin received the puck and drove it at the goal.

The whole stadium was brought to its feet. The way the cry "*Molodtsy*" was roared it could not be coming from only a hundred throats. Was this victory? Two nil! It certainly looked like it.

The quintettes replaced each other in rapid succession, but now it was all the same to Bobrov whether he was in the field or sitting on the other side of the boards. There was no rest. He was in the game all the time. His comrades probably felt much as he did. Nobody could count himself out of the game for any length of time, it was simply impossible to do that. Once anybody lost the pace for a single second it was doubtful if he could find the strength to carry on. There could be no question of not carrying on. Once again, the coach sent his first quintette into the fight.

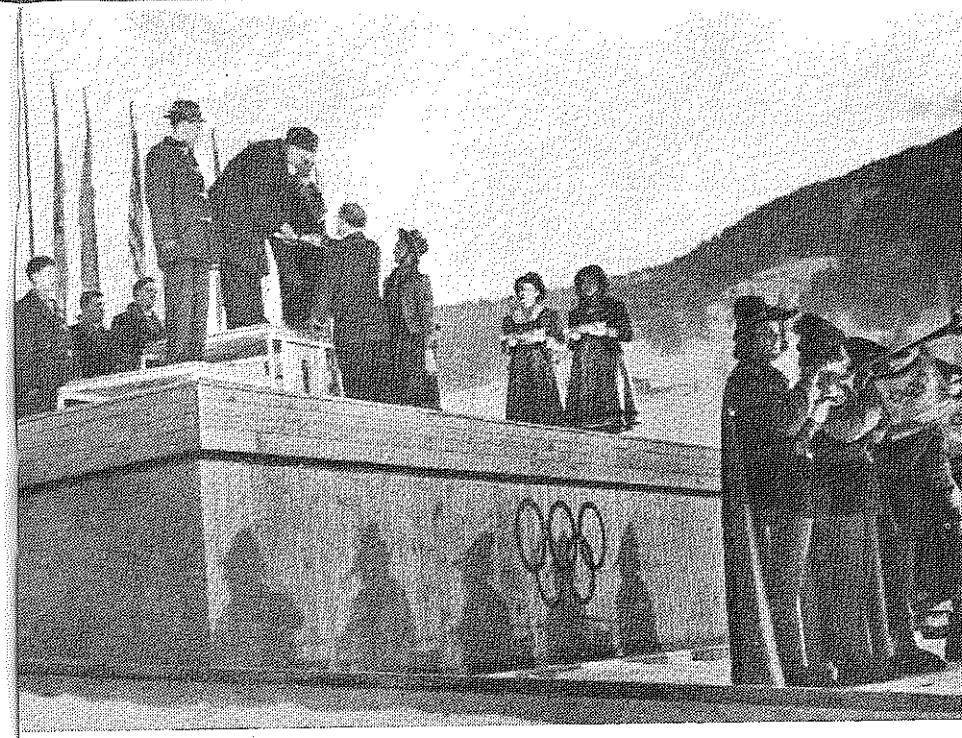
Yes, it was a fight and nothing else—a bout between wrestlers or boxers. Only they fought it out on ice. The Canadians were losing their heads completely. Sologubov took the puck away from two of their forwards. Pass....

And without the least delay, Bobrov, the puck glued to his stick, sped forward. In front of him was the back Arthur Hurst! No, it was no easy matter to take the puck away from Bobrov. He went past the back.

But a moment later he was given a push and crashed against the boards with his chest. Hurst went off the ice and almost immediately he was followed by Sidorenkov....

Bobrov watched the last spasms of the struggle already from the bench. Pantyukhov shot the puck at the goal, but it flew at the goalie. Guryshev's shot went wild. Uvarov took a swing at the puck, but was sent flying against the boards by a rough shove from one of the Canadians.

The second quintette, the heroes of the day, ended this game with fierce attacks. And when the minutes of this unprecedentedly tense match ran out and the pulsating second hand on the huge stop-watch grew still, the whole stadium rushed down to the ice to greet the new Olympic, European and world champions. Then and there, they formed a group with their coach, and their happy, jubilant



Prize-giving ceremony. Vsevolod Bobrov, captain of the Soviet team, receives the championship gold medals

faces were photographed by cameramen and reporters. They left the stadium with the admiring crowd pressing on all sides and showering congratulations on them.

Just before the ceremony of lowering the flag and extinguishing the Olympic flame on the day the Olympic Games were closed, Bobrov climbed the pedestal of honour. He stood there in full view of the whole stadium. And when the President of the International Olympic Committee put a pyramid of little boxes into his hands they trembled. These were awards for all his team-mates—for Krylov and for Uvarov, for Kuzin and for Pantyukhov, for Khlystov and for Guryshev, for Babich and for Shuvalov, for Puchkov and for Sologubov, who was acknowledged the best back of the tournament.

VI

The days spent at Cortina d'Ampezzo receded ever farther into the past. Life entered its ordinary round. Bobrov was sitting for the spring examination; his graduation from the Academy in the autumn was drawing near. His wife, Tatyana, was busy with her rehearsals at the Operetta Theatre.

One evening, looking at the medal her husband won at the Olympic Games, she said in a half-joking, half-serious tone: "You know, Vsevolod, for people like you and me it's important to know when to leave the stage. What do you think?"

"I suppose you're right," Bobrov agreed, feeling at the same time an icy chill somewhere at the bottom of his heart. He knew he would have to give up ice hockey one day and that it was doubtful if there would ever be a better time for that than now: the defeat handed out by the Canadians had been avenged and the team whose captain he was since its formation had captured the world and Olympic title. It was a success that might never again repeat itself in his sporting career. But did that really matter? He was no actor. He did not need to make a graceful exit.

But that meant he would be out of the 1957 World Championship in Moscow, that he would be leaving the team, his comrades, at a crucial moment. The closer the end of the summer loomed, the more he thought of this.

The coolness that came with autumn invigorated him. His old hockey scars had healed. His muscles and his heart, unaccustomed as it was to beat calmly, demanded action.

The thought of whether he had the right to leave the team began to bother him more and more. Was it too early for that? Should he not fully utilize the "minutes" at his disposal "until the end of the game"? Many were the times he had scored the winning goal in the last few seconds before the final whistle. Perhaps the team would need that success this time, too?

Home from Italy, Bobrov and his wife look over his sports trophies

After his graduation from the Military Academy, these doubts caused him more discomfort than he cared to admit. But he was still wavering, and when on October 14, 1956, Nikolai Sologubov raised the flag of the U.S.S.R. Championship at the artificial ice rink in Sokolniki Park, Bobrov was not in the Army's line-up. Neither was Victor Shuvalov with the first trio; he had firmly resolved not to return to the ice. Only indefatigable Babich was there with the young players.

Bobrov anxiously scrutinized the new generation of Army players. Would the young forwards Konstantin Loktev, Veniamin Alexandrov and Alexander Cherepanov be up to

the mark? He felt they would: they were fast and plucky. Although he had never played with them, he felt they were playing his game. That was particularly true of 19-year-old Veniamin Alexandrov. Not only was he as tall, broad-shouldered, agile and fearless as Bobrov, but he also played in the same manner. It seemed as though Bobrov's son had taken his place in the van of the Army team. At the stadium, Bobrov heard quite a few people exclaim: "Who said Bobrov wasn't playing? There he is!" But a closer look showed them that it was not the veteran captain of the national team but a young player who had joined the side only this winter. But the resemblance was so amazing that they added: "He's got Bobrov's go. Look how he's making rings round the backs. . . ."

But the more Bobrov watched the young players, the clearer it became to him that he had to play in the coming World Championship. What he saw before him was actually a new team which was quite different from the one that had played in Cortina d'Ampezzo. Krylov, Kuzin, Kuchevsky and Shuvalov were missing, and if he, too, would go, that would mean that of the three quintettes, only the third, headed by Guryshev, would have all its tried players. That was where the danger lay. Could he, the captain, leave the team when such danger was staring it in the face?

Before long the stick was in Bobrov's hands once more, and once again, with his proved friend, faithful Makar, at his side, he was driving the solid rubber puck through the air. Shuvalov's place in the forward line was taken by young Grebennikov. The team began to prepare for the World Championship.

When these preparations were at their height the news was received that such serious claimants for the title as Canada and the U.S.A. would not be in the running. Did that mean the other claimants were not dangerous? No, nobody thought that that was so. It was enough to remember that in all the encounters with the Swedes in the past few years the team had had to strain itself to the utmost,

Bobrov carries the puck into the net

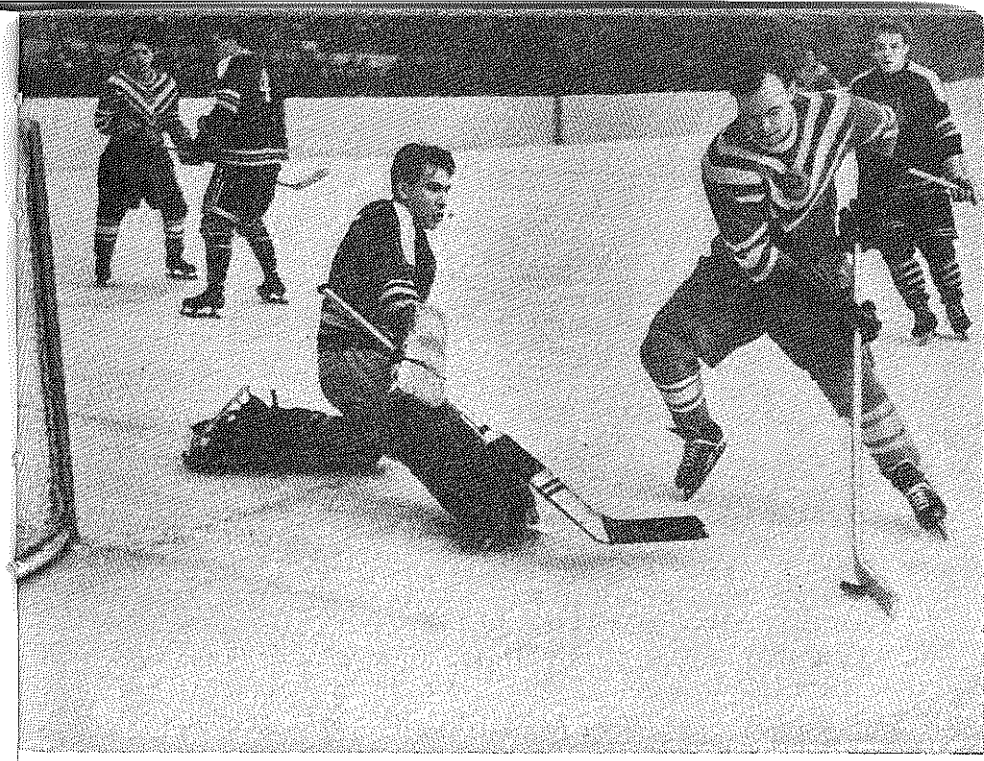
while the Czechoslovak players plunged into hard training for the contests in Moscow as soon as they returned from the White Olympiad.

Bobrov began the new season very well. He was seen by hockey fans in Warsaw, he was applauded in Helsinki and Prague. It was a pleasure to watch him play, and the number of pucks netted by him and his comrades on the first quintette grew steadily. Sports writers unanimously declared that the best players in these test games were the "academicians" Bobrov and Babich.

Yet Bobrov was not satisfied. He felt that something had gone wrong with the team. Was it the tempo of the attacks? The harmony within the quintettes? The collective will shaped through an intricate synthesis of personalities welded into one? It was impossible to say what, but every training session, every game confirmed Bobrov's fears. The fact that his fears were not ungrounded was conclusively brought home to him after three friendly games with the first Czechoslovak national team. Only one of these games was won, with a minimum lead of 1 : 0, the other two matches ended in a 2 : 2 draw.

"What will the fourth game with the Czechs, the official match for the World Championship, bring?" Bobrov asked himself for the hundredth time as he led his team into the rink. The main arena of the new Lenin Stadium was chosen for the game, because the stands around the rink in the Sports Palace, intended for 16,000 spectators, could not accommodate all who wanted to see the game. It was only natural that there were so many fans, for the victories scored by the Soviet side over the teams of Japan, Finland, Austria and Poland had already been entered in the tournament sheet and only three games, two of them decisive, were left. What would be their outcome?

The match with Czechoslovakia ended in a tie, again with the score of 2 : 2! But for Bobrov that was the last game: the Czechs knew what he spelt for them and did not let him play. Every time he got the puck, the entire Czechoslovak quintette pounced on him, blocked his path, shoved him against the boards, threw themselves bodily on his stick. In one of the tussles around the Czechoslovak goal, a back hit his leg. There was a swelling and it had to be operated on. That pulled Bobrov out of the Championship before the critical meeting with the Swedes, who, after their victory over the Czechoslovaks, were in the lead by one point. What a coincidence that was, for in the 1954 World Championship, too, the Soviet side started the final game one point behind their chief adversaries.



Bobrov scored four times in the game with the Finns, who finished fourth in the championship

The game that was to decide the Championship was played on March 5 at the Lenin Stadium.

The Swedes call their national team the "Three Crowns" because three crowns adorn the breast of each player. In the team itself, meanwhile, the three "crowns" were Johansson, Määtta, Lindström. Their coach threw them against the weakest quintette on the Soviet team and it proved to be the one on which Bobrov and Babich had played. Their places were taken by Vitali Kostyryov and Vladimir Grebennikov, two young, unseasoned players.

The most aggressive, the most formidable trio of forwards was absent. How their presence would have rallied the team!

The soft couch that Bobrov was lying on seemed hard and full of nails. Babich did not feel any easier even though

he was sitting on the bench with the team. He was in an overcoat and instead of a helmet wore a cap. For an instant, he appeared on the screen of the TV set and Bobrov's heart contracted. Selfless Makar was on the other side of the boards. He was not playing. Today, the whole trio was on the other side of the boards. Anxiety for the team, which was playing without its captain, for the untried young players, clenched at his heart. Keeping his eyes glued to the TV set he watched the game begin and during the tense moments forgot that his stick was not in his hands and that he was at home, far from the scene of battle.

Unnoticeably, the Swedes slackened the pace, reduced the speed of the attacks, and counter-attacked themselves. The quintettes were changed every other minute and with each change the plan of the Swedes became evident: they were pitting "Tumba's" trio against Uvarov, Kostyryov and Grebennikov, who were still new to each other. That was where the main threat was! The other two quintettes had to play a more active game, but Guryshev's quintette let Nelson calmly net a puck. The young forwards Loktev, Alexandrov and Cherepanov had no answer to that. In the meantime, the Swedes changed their players, and "Tumba" was back on the ice. Bobrov's old friend, Sven Johansson, played remarkably well in Moscow. He was acknowledged the best forward in the Championship.

Danger! Määttа broke through to the goal. He sent the puck to Lindström and the next moment saw the red lamp flash on over the Soviet goal.

The first period was not yet over but the score was already 2 : 0. What were they doing? Why couldn't they take the puck out of the corners? Why were they letting the Swedes pin them to the boards? It was not their usual game and the team itself was different.... It was all because of this leg.... If only he could go out into the field for just two minutes....

In the 13th minute of the second period, Loktev, Alexandrov and Cherepanov launched a furious attack and Alexandrov finally scored. This gave the team new strength. The players came out of their stupor and in the remaining eight minutes of the period the team played as it did throughout the sixty minutes in Italy. Their whirlwind pace bewildered the Swedes. The great "Tumba" rushed about the rink, helpless to stop the onslaught. Tregubov, Khlystov and Sologubov scored in quick succession. It seemed that if the period had lasted for another three or four minutes the score would have kept mounting. It was only the whistle ending the period that stopped the terrific offensive. The 0 : 2 that looked down from the scoreboard only a short while before was replaced by the figure 4 : 2....

People thought that if the world champions would not increase the score they could at least preserve it. But this

Czech players rushing Bobrov

time even Bobrov's keen insight let him down, for when the team skated into the rink for the third period it looked sluggish and disunited. The forwards led by Johansson decided the destiny of the World Championship by winning back two goals. The Swedes equalized the score (4 : 4) and won the World and European Championship.

What consolation could Vsevolod Bobrov draw when, at last, he switched off his TV set? From the fact that even though he had not played in the last two games he was the top scorer in the tournament with 13 pucks? From the fact that his young double and pupil Alexandrov was behind him by only two pucks? From the thought that if he had not been hurt he and Babich would probably have not let "Tumba's" trio bring off this tie as had been the case in 1954 during the fierce game on the snow-bound rink, which the Swedes no doubt remembered?

No, nothing could take the edge off the bitterness of this failure and that made it even more bitter. The captain's absence had told on the team in this game.

What was to be done now? To count up the battle-scars and the number of pucks scored? To announce to the world that Bobrov's career has run its course?

No, no, this was not the time to think of leaving the stage. Without wasting any time he had to begin training the team for the 1958 World Championship, for the games in Oslo. Was it really so important what his role would be in the forthcoming work? The important thing was to pass his experience on to young players, the heirs of the veteran hockey player Vsevolod Bobrov. And it was no accident that recently in Moscow a poster announced:

"... Finals for Boys' Teams for the Bobrov Trophy."

A few years from now spectators at the World Ice Hockey Championship will see a Soviet team with not one but ten new Bobrovs, and then it will be difficult for any adversary to stop their stormy onslaughts, which will have behind them youth plus the skill handed down by Bobrov.

Dear Reader,

In reply to a request by the Publishing House, I shall say a few words about myself.

People often ask me how I learned to play hockey, why I have dropped football, what are my intentions for the future, and so forth. Without taking up much space I shall try to answer these questions.

I grew up in a family of sportsmen. Ever since I can remember, I have been hearing talk about hockey and as a child I frequently went to watch my father, my brother and their friends play. I learned from them and when I was eight I began to play myself. I think that that is the reason for my successes in sports.

Beginning with 1946, I divided my time between hockey and football. But when I enrolled in the Academy I found that frequent matches and tours around the country and abroad were tearing me away from my studies. I had to sacrifice football and catch up on my studies in the summer.

I have been playing hockey for nearly 25 years. I admit that in the last few years I am finding it more and more difficult to play on the national side. But so long as I feel that I am needed and useful to the team I shall continue playing.

In conclusion, I should like to remind people who like hockey that it is a game in which team-work counts most of all. No matter how good a player is he will never amount to anything without the support of his team-mates. When a team pools its will and acts as one man and there is full understanding and cooperation between the goalie, the backs and the forwards, you may be sure that it is on the road to victory. I would never have been so successful in the game if it had not been for my old and tried friends Babich and Shuvalov.

With warm greetings, Vsevolod Bobrov